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# **Violence and the Algerian Military**

**By**

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This work has not been previously submitted in whole, or in part, for the award of any degree. It is my own work. Each significant contribution to, and quotation in, this dissertation from the work, or works, of other people has been attributed, and has been cited and referenced.

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## ABSTRACT

*Since the military coup of 1992, Algeria has been involved in a conflict which has claimed the lives of at least 100 000 people. The conflict has generally been portrayed as one which has pitted Islamists against the secular Algerian government. However, a study of Algerian history illustrates a sustained and dominant role of the Algerian military. The dominance of the military was firmly entrenched in the 1965 coup led by Boumedienne. His successor Benjedid, an active-duty colonel, selected by a core military elite upon Boumedienne's sudden illness, continued the military dominance, although during both reigns a civilian facade was maintained. The coup of 1992 was organised by a select group of generals who continue to wield power in Algeria today. The behaviour of the military in Algeria, subsequent to the coup, was marked by assassinations, disappearances, torture and violent repression of those who opposed the military controlled state. This behaviour reflects the behaviour of the military during the war of liberation, and during independence. Of equal importance is that the present military elite has used covert organisations whose modus operandi mirrors French military conduct during the war of liberation. This includes the use of torture to instil fear among the Algerian population. Consequently, to understand the violence which has engulfed Algeria since 1992 is to understand the dominance of the military and military elite. These men continue to wield power through the only means they have been confronted with and encountered, force.*

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## LIST OF ACRONYMS

Algerian Ulama	AUMA
Arme Islamique du Salut	AIS
Armée de Libération Nationale	ALN
Armée Nationale Populaire	ANP
Comité Révolutionnaire d'Unité et d'Action	CRUA
Delegation Generale de Documentation et Surete	DGDS
Front de Liberation Nationale	FLN
Front Islamique du Salut	FIS
Group Islamique Arme	GIA
Haut Comite d'Etat	HCE
Haut Comité Sécurité	HCS
Mouvement Nationaliste Algerien	MNA
Organisation Speciale	OS
Presidential Security Service	SSP
Securite Militaire	SM
Special Intervention Group	GIS

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Since 1992, after a military coup, Algeria has been involved in a conflict which has claimed the lives of thousands of Algerians. Even after the adoption of the *concorde civile*, an amnesty agreement, approximately 100 to 200 Algerians continue to die each month.

This study examines the role of the military in Algerian political life and contends that the military has always been a major player in the political field with the result that disputes are settled with the sword rather than the pen. Through a study of Algerian history the importance of military might to solve problems is illuminated.

The extensive bloodshed in Algeria since the cancelled election of late 1992 cannot merely be reduced to a question of the Islamic Salvation Front's ideology or any other more extreme ideology. Especially in the current discourse, particularly after the events of September 11, the Islamist threat has become the central topic of academic and political discussion with acts of violence and terror falling within the realm of Islamist behaviour. This does not mean that the Islamists are exempt from any responsibility for the state of violence in which Algeria finds itself, nonetheless an excessive emphasis on the Islamist threat prevents an examination of other parties who may be as responsible or even more so for the conflict. The persistence of a military presence in the political arena and its continued recourse to violence to quell opposition throughout Algerian history will be illustrated to help understand the violence which has engulfed Algeria.



## 1.1 Literature review

There is extensive literature on Algeria, especially the war of liberation and most recently the current conflict. However, none of the writers focus specifically on the military's role in the development of Algeria. Although aspects of the military involvement are discussed, a historical development of the military does not form the primary basis of the studies. The following discusses a few of the dominant and current writings on Algeria since the coup of 1992.

Luis Martinez has written a contentious account of the Algerian conflict. In his book, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, Martinez postulates the theory that the Algerian conflict is a method of accumulating wealth and prestige and as a result is constantly being readapted by the participants in the conflict. This theory is qualified by his assertion that the historical context for the development of a war culture must be taken into account in order to understand the process. He then proceeds to develop his theory by explaining that in Algerian history violence has been a respected means of social advancement and this has been particularly evident with the Corsairs under the Ottoman Empire, the Caid (native official) under colonial rule and Colonel (officer of the *Armée de Libération Nationale*) during the war of liberation. The following chapters are an in-depth account of the development of the war economy in Algeria. Through interviews with various members of society from the petty trader to the wealthy elite the various nuances and intricacies of the war are shaped. The notion of the monolithic Islam and secularist regime battling it out is immediately eroded. Cruelty inflicted on individuals by the regime, perceptions of the *Front de Liberation Nationale*, Islam in all its forms, corruption, inter alia, are aspects which one becomes privy to through the interviews. Furthermore, the changing beliefs of individuals as the war progresses illustrate the metamorphic character of the war. Martinez illustrates how as the war develops the economically impoverished Algerian has either taken the path of joining the Islamists or the army for further social advancement. A social change is taking place, as those who were unable to gain access to wealth under the *Front de Liberation Nationale* are now able to accumulate wealth as armed Islamists. The military has also been able to

consolidate its wealth through financial packages received from the international community and multinational oil companies that have recently entered Algeria. Moreover, the military has been able to monopolise the import and export trade and its members are the few Algerians able to obtain visas.

The development of individuals, groups, institutions and states in the economy of war is discussed in detail. Critique has been levelled at Martinez for neglecting to examine ideology in his study, and regarding material motivation as the only driving force in the civil war. Admittedly, these were my first thoughts on completion of the book since it appeared to be a sad indictment of Algerian society. However, Martinez does maintain that the protagonists of the civil war are the ones who thrive in the environment of violence. The war is now being waged by smaller armed guerrillas controlled by Emirs who have turned to illegal activity. Nonetheless, Martinez fails to consistently confine his central theory to these protagonists. Perhaps a more delineated appraisal of the situation should have been undertaken with a clear caveat that the war allows certain individuals, groups and institutions to prosper and that many Algerians may not be seeking wealth or prestige through violence. The pronouncement that the violence is limited to groups is not made often enough. This may be the down fall of the book, since the final assessment leaves the reader with a bitter taste since it would seem that accumulation of wealth and prestige is a driving force for Algerians. This point is dealt with more harshly by Hugh Roberts who maintains that “Martinez’s wider argument seems to express a regression into orientalism of the worst kind, a regression which is not in itself implicit in the core of his analysis so much as plastered around it as a mystical shell.”<sup>1</sup>

Moreover, the role of the military is primarily dealt with in so far as it forms part of the war economy. The history of military involvement and suppression of opposition is not dealt with sufficiently. It would appear that a theory is postulated and then supported, rather than a factual depiction of the situation followed by a theoretical analysis. This ultimately results in the feeling that not all aspects of the story have been told.

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1. Hugh Roberts, *Embattled Algeria 1988-2002: Studies in a Broken Polity*, Verso, London, 2003, 256.

Martin Stone's work, *The Agony of Algeria*, is probably the most comprehensive work on the current conflict. It is a historical account predating the war of independence and discusses social, economic, domestic and international political aspects. The military forms part of this analysis from its inception to its current role. However, although mention is made of covert activities from information garnered from organisations such as Amnesty International, the extent and pattern of military violence and terror is not expounded upon fully. Understandably to delve thoroughly into the intricacies of the military's use of terror would detract from the more general overall picture Stone achieves in painting. The book does however provide a basis for understanding military participation in the war.

Michael Willis' book entitled *Islamist Challenge in Algeria*, as the title suggests, focuses predominately on the rise of Islamism in Algeria and the Islamist role in the current conflict. Although once again the covert tactics of the military are mentioned, they form a minor part of the discussion and these activities are not really placed in an historical context of military behaviour. Nonetheless, Willis' book provides an understanding, because of his historical study of the development of Islamists as a political force, of the movement's ideology, support base, external influences and the responses to the movement by both the colonial government and independent Algerian government. He concludes with the salient point that Islamist movements have not been sparked by religious fervour, but rather by the social, political and economic hardships that Algerians faced in the late 1970s and continue to face today.

The most recent account of the current conflict is provided by Hugh Roberts in his book entitled *Embattled Algeria 1988-2002: Studies in a Broken Polity*. The book is basically a collection of essays relating to the crisis from 1988 to 2002. Roberts is a specialist in Algeria and this becomes abundantly clear with the insight he brings into the study of the conflict. As a result of his knowledge on the subject he is able to provide in depth analyses of the issues involved in the conflict. The book is however a collection and as such the flow of the work is interrupted. The military once again does not form the primary analysis, but weaved into some of the essays is the role the military plays in

Algerian political life. The primacy of the military since the war of liberation is a theme in the context of his discussions. A detailed documentation of this process is not provided, and although the covert practises of the military is discussed, this is only really done in passing. Since this book is in essay format the reader is able to gain an understanding of identity issues, the Islamist movement, the political landscape in terms of parties involved, elections and democratisation. It therefore also shows the complexity of the Algerian conflict. Nonetheless, although acknowledging the primacy of the military, the military's involvement in the conflict and its covert activities in attempts to eliminate the Islamist threat are not discussed independently. No single essay deals explicitly with the military.

Most accounts of the military in Algeria can be found in journal articles by authors such as Zartman and Joffe. Even though these articles focus on the dominant role of the military, they do not focus on the military in terms of the violence and terror which has engulfed Algerian society. The only reports which focus on the violence are those reports by organisations, such as, Amnesty International, Algeria – Watch, and Human Rights Watch.

This work examines the role of the military in Algerian history and incorporates the accounts of violence and terror from the abovementioned organisations. It seeks to create a systematic and coherent understanding of the violence which has enveloped Algeria by placing these accounts in context and with reference to previous accounts of violence and terror in Algerian history perpetrated by the military.

## 1.2 Methodology

The methodology adopted is a historical descriptive case study. The justification for adopting this method is that, as discussed in the literature review, insufficient focus has been paid to the military's role in the conflict. Although, most writers admit that the military has been instrumental in the conflict, no thorough study of the military has been taken independently and none specifically in relation to the violence which has ensued.

A historical descriptive case study can help illustrate a pattern of specific features which could subsequently be used as a factual source base for further theoretical and conceptual studies.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, especially within an African context, a historical study is imperative, since any explanation of an African military cannot be undertaken without understanding the colonial impact on the country and the process of decolonisation. The origins and traditions of present day armed forces in most of ex-colonial Africa may be traced to colonial rule in Africa. Therefore an understanding of the military today requires an understanding of its roots and the forces which shaped its development.<sup>3</sup> This is particularly relevant in the Algerian context. The French military during colonial occupation virtually ran the colonial state and impacted society deeply. The Algerian military after independence came to display very similar characteristics to its colonial predecessor.

It has been suggested that the best analysis of the military is to integrate the internal characteristics of the military approach with the social and political circumstances in which armed forces operate. The former approach is mainly restricted to the internal characteristics and interaction of the armed forces, and has as its main proponent Janowitz, and the latter, focusing on the socio-political environment is generally associated with Huntington and Finer.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, focusing on the socio-political environment is crucial, especially when discussing Africa which endured colonial

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2. Ibid. xv.

3. A. Omara-Otunna, *Politics and the Military in Uganda*, London, Macmillan Press, 1987.

4. S. Baynham, *Military Power and Politics in Black Africa*, Kent, Croom Helm Ltd, 1986.

imposition and which subsequently had to pick up the pieces after colonial rule. It also enables an examination of regional and international factors on the military.

Thus, while a historical descriptive analysis will be rendered, special emphasis will be placed on the social and political circumstances that shaped the development of the military and the military elite and where possible the internal characteristics of the military will be provided in order to render a comprehensive study.

The adoption of a case study approach has obvious benefits. A case study permits a more in depth study of the military and accommodates complexities which may arise. Since a study focusing on the military appears lacking, a descriptive case study will help establish factual accounts.

Finally, the use of sources such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch may be contentious because organisations such as these may use emotive language to alert a wider audience to existing conflicts. Wherever information from these sources has been used, I have attempted to substantiate the claims using other sources. Admittedly, it is these organisations that often come into daily contact with the victims of violence and often present the most information regarding violent conflict. Therefore, as a source, organisations such as Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch provide valuable information on cases of conflict.

## 1.3 Concepts

The following are a few concepts used in the telling of this tale. The motivation for this is that some concepts are quite contentious and it is therefore appropriate to provide a definition of the concept to create clarity in the work which follows.

### 1.3.1 Conflict

The term conflict will be used to describe the situation currently existing in Algeria. The reason for this is to avoid the ideological connotations that will readily be imputed when using terms such as, civil war or holy war, since Algeria is a predominately Muslim country. A conflict arises when there are more than 1 000 casualties per year.

### 1.3.2 Islamists

The word Islamists in this context denotes the persons involved in political Islam. Political Islam is a term established by Joel Beinin and Joe Stork and refers to a movement whose concerns can be regarded as temporal and political. The Quran and *Hadiths* (sayings and behaviours of the prophet Muhammad) are used by Islamists to justify their actions and pronouncements on certain issues. These Islamists use these religious texts and combine them with ideas and techniques of the present to cope with political, social, economic and cultural predicaments of the modern world. These predicaments often have their roots in the expansion of a capitalist market, colonisation by the French and English, the failures of economic and political development and the hybridisation of culture and identity often as a consequence of colonialism.<sup>5</sup>

### 1.3.3 Military elite

The term military elite refers to a small group, usually generals, who wield principal power in Algeria.

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5. J. Beinin, and J. Stork, On the Modernity, Historical Specificity, and International Context of Political Islam, In *Political Islam*, Joel Beinin and Joe Stork, Eds, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1997, 3-4.

## 1.4 Chapter Outlines

This work is comprised of two chapters. The first chapter provides a history of Algeria preceding the conflict. As with the second chapter, this chapter is divided into sections in order to illustrate the historical process. The first section provides a brief history of Algeria from the onset of colonialism to the formation of the *Armée de Libération Nationale*. Thereafter, in order to understand subsequent uses of violence and terror in Algeria, short accounts of the practices and behaviour of both the *Armée de Libération Nationale* and French army are provided. Finally, a discussion on the reigns of Ben Bella, Boumedienne and Benjedid, their use of force to eliminate opposition and the establishment of a military elite, concludes this chapter. The second chapter examines the conflict which followed the coup of 1992. This chapter is similarly divided into sections. The first focuses on the participants of the conflict in general. The second on the Algerian military specifically and the third examines the military's behaviour during the conflict. Lastly, the fourth section discusses the role of the international community since the 1992 coup. Finally, this work concludes with a summary of the salient issues drawn from the case study.



## 2. THE YEARS PRECEDING THE CONFLICT

### 2.1 Introduction

As discussed previously in the methodology, an analysis of current day events in Africa cannot be undertaken without reference to colonialism and the anti-colonial struggle. Especially in a country such as Algeria where colonialism was undertaken through force and predominately by a military force, an examination of colonialism and the fight against it becomes imperative. Furthermore, since this work argues that the violence since the coup of 1992 can only be understood in terms of the dominance of the military in political life, a historical pattern of military involvement, both Algerian and French, provides a foundation for understanding who the participants are and their behaviour during the conflict.

### 2.2 Colonial Conquest

*In order to dominate it, modify it, and plunder it for the profit of a new people you will always have to be the stronger, either through a permanent army or by the nature and constitution of a dominating people.*

Bugeaud addressing the members of the National Assembly<sup>6</sup>

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6. E. Hermassi, *Leaderships and National Development in North Africa*, London, University of California Press Ltd, 1972, 60.

### 2.2.1 Introduction

The following is a brief history of the colonial conquest of Algeria and the formation of political groups followed by armed resistance to end colonial rule.

### 2.2.2 Colonialism

Algeria was colonised by the French in 1830. Initially the French practised a form of limited occupation which meant that they would occupy the main towns of the Algerian coast while only exercising authority over the remainder of the country via native or Turkish rulers. However, the policy of limited occupation could not be sustained, primarily owing to the implacable hostility of Algerian Muslims to Christian rule and also because of the uncontrollable ambitions of the then small, though vocal, European colonist or *colon*. Consequently, in 1834 the occupied territories were annexed as a colony of France. A governor-general was created for the territory and in 1839 the country was officially named Algeria. Yet, unlike the easy colonisation of the Algerian littoral, French incursion into the interior was met with fierce native resistance which was sustained for nearly two decades. The most formidable resistance leader was Abdel Kader who through consensus, coercion and conquest was able to unite the many warring groups under his command. Abdel Kader was a young marabout who at the tender age of twenty-four was acclaimed by some of the tribes in the Mascara region as ‘Sultan of the Arabs’. A devout and courageous young leader, he declared his first task a holy war against the infidels.<sup>7</sup>

Despite Abdel Kader’s valiant resistance, the French prevailed. The expansionist-minded French military and bureaucrats would not be prevented from their colonial ambitions and decided on a policy of total war. This involved the destruction of villages, the burning of crops, the killing of herds and other methods aimed at debilitating the resistance. In 1840 General Bugeaud was appointed governor. Once the military took control of the colonial process, its own momentum carried it forward. The fight against

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7. C-R. Ageron, *Modern Algeria: a History from 1830 to the Present*, New Jersey, Africa World Press, Inc, 1991, 12.

Abdel Kader continued until his surrender in December 1847.<sup>8</sup> Pacification of Algerians took another quarter of a century, with local insurrections continuing especially in Amazigh<sup>9</sup> country and with the process only really coming to an end in the 1880s. Algeria therefore endured almost half a century of continual warfare.<sup>10</sup>

### 2.2.3 Algerian Nationalists

Under the Second Republic, France consisted mainly of peasants and soldiers with a very small middle class. Since a well-organised middle class was practically non-existent, the French officers were left to decide the fate of the native population in Algeria. They believed that the only way to further colonialism was to exterminate the native population in much the same way the Europeans had done in America. If extermination was too arduous, the best way to achieve their objective would be to push them into the mountains and deserts and repopulate the plains with French peasants. Initially Algeria failed to attract enough settlers since the rapid urbanisation in France absorbed most of the rural peasants. For this reason Napoleon III abandoned the policy of settler colonisation in 1860 and also averred, causing great consternation among the colons, “Algeria is not, strictly speaking, a colony but an Arab Kingdom”.<sup>11</sup> However, France in 1871, now under the Third Republic, returned to the policy of colonisation by settlement, and this time for good. The process was greatly assisted by the huge immigration of Alsatians and Lorrainers.<sup>12</sup>

By 1871 the French had also adopted the policy of assimilation. This process would be gradual and only apply once the Algerians had become ‘true Frenchmen’ in the cultural sense. The ideology at the time could not fathom or conceive of a civilisation other than that of the European civilisation. However, there was a fatal flaw in this policy. Besides the naïve supposition that it was possible to de-arabise Algeria, the scheme was further

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8. S. Amin, *The Maghreb in the Modern World*, London, Penguin Books Ltd, 1970, 96.

9. Amazigh is the name the Berbers prefer to be called. The word Berber means foreigner, which the Amazigh people are not.

10. S. Amin, op. cit., 96.

11. C-R. Ageron, op. cit., 38.

12. S. Amin, op. cit., 97.

undermined by the growing number of colons who were vehemently opposed to the system of assimilation. The colons were granted all the rights afforded those citizens living in a European democracy, while Muslims remained subject to the government of the 'Ministry of Native Affairs'.<sup>13</sup>

In reality, the system of assimilation was merely a facade for the destruction of the Algerian people. The effects of the process of assimilation is most aptly described by Hermassi,

On the pretext of the need for assimilation, France devoted nearly a century and a half to the erasing of all existent signs of Algerian sovereignty. Nationality, culture and local traditions were ultimately negated in the name of an ideology of integration. Not only did this policy destroy the state and force most of the urban bourgeois families to emigrate to the Middle East but it also took from the rural population its sense of identity and sentenced all Algerians to be pariahs in a caste society. In reality, integration meant that Algerians were sacrificed for and left out of the French-administered economic system; the tragic result was that Algerians had no control whatsoever over the sweeping socio-economic transformations of their own country.<sup>14</sup>

From the period 1870 to 1920 Algeria went through what was probably the most sombre period of history it had thus far experienced. The defeated peasantry was subjected to a new bureaucratic form of feudalism. This was a time when the peasantry was afflicted by the mortal wounds of settler extension and reduction of land leading to famine. Confined to the mountainous regions, nationalism took root firstly among those most affected by the French colonial onslaught.<sup>15</sup>

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13. Ibid.

14. E. Hermassi, *op. cit.*, 70.

15. S. Amin, *op. cit.*, 107.

The first signs of urban resistance appeared in the early years of the nineteenth century in the form of a small Muslim secularised elite. They sought equality with the French of Algeria and therefore urged the policy of assimilation. This would mean the end of fiscal inequality, the extension of primary education, an increase in political representation of the Muslim population and the abolition of the indigenat system.<sup>16</sup> However, soon more radical groups developed as a result of French suppression of the more moderate groups and French ruthless massacres such as the Setif massacre of 1945 which resulted in the deaths of over 45 000 Algerians.<sup>17</sup>

The succeeding years found Algerian national aspirations given form in multiple and often antagonistic organisations. Three orientations can be distinguished. The first was the reconciliatory expression found in the aspirations of the intellectuals and liberal bourgeoisie, most definitively symbolised by Ferhat Abbas. The second orientation was conceived in the labour milieu of Paris, under Messali and transplanted to Algeria in 1937 under the name of the *Parti du Peuple Algerien* and in its final form the *Mouvement Nationaliste Algerien* (MNA). Finally, the traditional literate bourgeoisie along with the Algerian Ulama (AUMA) who focused on the defence of cultural identity and made popular the slogan developed by Ben Badis, “Islam is our religion, Arabic our language and Algeria our country.”<sup>18</sup>

Despite numerous attempts at unification, these three orientations never succeeded in formulating a single coherent leadership. One hypothesis regarding the general dissensus among the Algerian elite is the complete destruction of their political state by a total colonial state.<sup>19</sup> The launching of the armed struggle was an attempt to transcend the divisions permeating the political elite which had effectively resulted in political impotence. The men who authored the initiative had previously attempted to establish a paramilitary organisation, *Organisation Speciale* (OS), which was short lived, since it was soon discovered and dismantled. The underground leaders of the OS included Ben

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16. Native penal system that provides the French administrators with extensive and excessive powers.

17. C-R. Ageron, op. cit., 102.

18. E. Hermassi, op. cit., 131.

19. Ibid. 132.

Bella, Ait Ahmed, Mohamed Boudiaf and Abdelhafid Boussouf. A new organisation known as the *Comité Révolutionnaire d'Unité et d'Action* (CRUA) and then as the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) would not fail and called for unity of action by everyone, without judgement of past differences.<sup>20</sup> The most prominent members of the FLN were Rabah Bitat, Mostefa Ben Boulaid, Mourad Didouche, Mohamed Boudiaf, Belkarem Krim, Larbi Ben M'Hidi, Ahmed Ben Bella, Mohamed Khider and Hocine Ait Ahmed.<sup>21</sup> These men were known as the *Neuf Historiques* - the Historic Nine. The armed wing of the FLN was the *Armée de Libération Nationale*.

Nonetheless, the pretext of unity achieved during the fight for liberation was always that, merely a pretext. Already in 1936 Ferhat Abbas declared:

Had I discovered the Algerian nation, I would be a nationalist and I would not blush as if I had committed a crime....However, I will not die for the Algerian nation, because it does not exist. I have not found it. I have examined History, I questioned the living and the dead, I visited cemeteries; nobody spoke to me about it. I then turned to the Koran and I sought for one solitary verse forbidding a Muslim from integrating himself with a non-Muslim nation. I did not find that either. One cannot build on the wind.<sup>22</sup>

#### 2.2.4 Conclusion

The French military was instrumental in colonising Algeria because of continued resistance from Algerians. Only through destruction of land, homes and cattle was total conquest achieved. Political resistance to colonialism failed to achieve any significant change, primarily owing to the competing ideologies of the groups. The armed resistance which eventually emerged tried to unify cleavages existing among these groups.

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20. Ibid. 135.

21. P. Paul-Marie, *L'indépendance au bout du fusil*, In *Jeune Afrique L'intelligent*, Series number 4, 2002, 25.

22. E. Hermassi, op. cit., 33.

However, the unity achieved was merely a facade and allegiances and rivalries continued to mark Algerian society.

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## 2.3 The Anti-Colonial Struggle

*We rebel for life and death,  
and we promised to vivify Algeria:  
be witnesses of it!  
We are rebel soldiers, and we fight  
for right and independence;  
because France does not listen to our voices...*

Hymn of the Underground<sup>23</sup>

### 2.3.1 Introduction

The previous section provided a brief description of colonialism in Algeria and the formation of the armed resistance, the FLN, and its military wing the *Armée de Libération Nationale* (ALN). This section discusses the roles of the ALN and the French army in the war of liberation. The animosity between groups within the ALN, the eradication of those the FLN leaders considered a threat, and the methods of torture used by the French army as well as its political agenda are issues which become manifest in independent Algeria and the subsequent conflict. Therefore, an understanding of the ALN and the French army provides a foundation for understanding subsequent events.

#### 2.3.1.1 The Armée de Libération Nationale

The ALN was the backbone of the Algerian Revolution and without it no political effort would have been meaningful. During the early months of rebellion the army was no more than a band of men operating on their own and raiding the French army for guns and ammunition. However, in 1956 at the Soummam Valley Conference members of the FLN concluded that,

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<sup>23</sup>. P.C. Naylor, *France and Algeria: A History of Decolonisation and Transformation*, Gainesville, University Press of Florida, 2000, 23.



It is an undeniable fact that the action of the ALN has reversed the political climate of Algeria.

It has provoked a psychological shock which has liberated the people from a torpor, from its fear, from its scepticism.

It has permitted the Algerian people a new consciousness of its national dignity.

It has brought about as well a psycho-political unity of all Algerians, a national unanimity which fertilises the armed struggle and renders the victory ineluctable.<sup>24</sup>

At the conference it was decided that Algeria would be divided into six *wilayas* (military districts) which were based mainly on old political divisions.<sup>25</sup> To the original five *wilayas*, a further *wilaya* of the Sahara was added. The city of Algiers was regarded as an autonomous zone. Each *wilaya* was divided into regions, and each region into sectors. The *wilaya* commander held the rank of colonel, the highest rank the army would use during the war. Each military unit consisted of a group of eleven men; the section of thirty-five men; the company of one hundred and ten men; and the battalion of three hundred and fifty men. There were three types of army volunteers: the *moudjahidines* (freedom fighters or combatants of the faith), the *moussebelines* (auxiliaries) and the *fidayines* (city fighters). In certain areas large commandos of death also known as *moussebelines* were established. They operated independently of local command and undertook particularly dangerous tasks.<sup>26</sup> At the early stages of the revolution a new recruit was required to undergo an initiation ritual. The initiation involved killing a designated traitor, Mouchard-police spy or informer, French gendarme officer or colonialist, whilst in the company of a shadow who would kill the aspiring recruit himself if he saw any sign of hesitation. Krim, the leader of the interior military, admitted this policy in an interview in a Yugoslav journal, in which he stated that, "An assassination

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24. J. Gillespie, *Algeria: Rebellion and Revolution*, London, Ernest Benn Limited, 1960, 132-133.

25. Ibid. 107.

26. Ibid. 108.

marks the end of the apprenticeship of each candidate for the A.L.N.” This passing out ceremony marked the acceptance of the apprentice into the ranks as he proved himself reliable and became bound almost Faust-like to the cause.<sup>27</sup>

As the war progressed so too did the Algerian army from a revolutionary army to a regular army. Initially all newcomers had been accepted, but as the ranks swelled, the army became more discerning. Preference was given to those who possessed former military training and training became more extensive within the ranks. In the camps in Tunisia and Morocco extensive courses were provided for both officers and men. Some of these men were sent as far as Egypt for commando courses and others to East Germany for engineering studies. As a result of the regulation of the army, discipline became more regularised with the establishment of disciplinary codes and often harsh sentences meted out for any breaches of the code.<sup>28</sup>

During 1956 and 1957, the internal ALN successfully applied hit and run tactics, classic canons of guerrilla warfare. The fighters specialised in night raids, ambushes and avoided any direct contact with superior French firepower. Once they had completed their tasks they would merge back within the population of the countryside.<sup>29</sup> The key *wilayas* throughout the war were the Aures and Kabyle. These areas were predominately populated by Amazigh speakers from which the fighters drew much of their support.<sup>30</sup> The ALN independence fighters were inspired by writings from classic texts on guerrilla warfare. As such they borrowed most techniques from Mao, Viet Minh and Yugoslav partisans. These techniques were then applied creatively to the altered Algerian conditions.<sup>31</sup>

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27. A. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, London, Macmillan London Ltd, 1977, 34.

28. J. Gillespie, *op. cit.*, 108-109.

29. Library of Congress, *Algeria: Conduct of the War*, [Online], Available: [http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field\(DOCID+dz0039\)](http://lcweb2.loc.gov/cgi-bin/query/r?frd/cstdy:@field(DOCID+dz0039)), [4 September 2002], 1993, 1.

30. K.W. Grundy, *Guerrilla Struggle in Africa*, New York, Grossman Publishers, 1971, 84.

31. *Ibid.* 90.

Although writers at the time, such as Fanon and Gillespie, viewed the war of liberation with admiration, there were also problems. Tensions were always running high within the political and military elite. Some of the *wilaya* commanders died under mysterious circumstances, probably victims of jealous rivalries.<sup>32</sup> Moreover, there are numerous accounts of honour killings. Anthropologists have noted that honour remains a constant preoccupation of Mediterranean societies. People in the Mediterranean are often called upon to use the concepts of honour and shame in order that their own conduct and that of members within the society can be assessed.<sup>33</sup> Honour and shame permeates the lives of individuals in exclusive societies where face to face personal interaction dominates and relations between individuals are of utmost importance. This is exemplified in Professor Bourdieu's analysis of honour in Kabyle society where values of honour constitute the basis of the Kabyle political order.<sup>34</sup> Consequently, reference is often made of honour killings in the war and in the subsequent conflict following the 1992 coup which will be discussed later.

Besides rivalries and honour killings, politically motivated assassinations of members of the liberation movement were also evident. Ramdane Abane, a staunch Algerian nationalist and firm believer in a military struggle suffered this fate. It is believed that a jury constituted of high-ranking FLN officials headed by Krim Belkacem and Cherif Mahmoud decided that Abane was becoming a threat to the revolutionary cause. Although there is rumour of a document officialising the assassination none has been found, and there still remains a cloud of mystery shrouding his death. The reasons for the assassination are unknown. There is speculation that Abane was becoming too powerful and threatened the power of the established FLN leadership. Others maintain that his harsh treatment of those who committed war crimes and his dictatorial impulses may have been reasons for his death. Abane was strangled at a farmhouse near Tetouan and his body has never been found.<sup>35</sup> The ALN was also used to eradicate opposition groups

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32. D. and M. Ottaway, *Algeria, The Politics of a Socialist Revolution*, California, University of California Press, 1970, 15.

33. J.G. Peristiany, *Honour and Shame: The Values of Mediterranean Society*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1966, 10.

34. Ibid. 16.

35. World Amazigh Action Coalition, *Historical Figures: Algeria*, [Online], Available: [http://www.waac.org/amazigh/history/personalities/algeria/krim\\_belkacem.html](http://www.waac.org/amazigh/history/personalities/algeria/krim_belkacem.html), [5 August 2002], 1998.

or those the leaders believed deviated from the principles of the FLN such as the Algerian Communist Party and Messali's M.N.A. In a proclamation issued by the FLN and drafted by none other than Abane, dated April 1, 1955, the FLN declared,

The tribunal of the A.L.N [Armée de Liberation Nationale, as the military arm of the F.L.N. has now become known] will be pitiless towards traitors and enemies of the country...<sup>36</sup>

This the ALN was without hesitation. The army received orders, often from Ben Bella, such as "Liquidate all personalities who want to play the role of *interlocuteur valable*" and "Kill any person attempting to deflect the militants and inculcate in them a *bourguibien* spirit".<sup>37</sup>

### 2.3.1.2 Boumedienne and the External Army

More than 30 000 men were deployed along conventional lines as an external army in Moroccan and Tunisian sanctuaries near the Algerian border. Here they served mainly to divert French manpower from the main theatres of guerrilla activity. The external army was, however, effectively cut off from the theatre of battle by formidable defence lines of electrified barbed wire and minefields built by the French in 1957 all along Algeria's borders with Morocco and Tunisia. This line was known as the Morice Line. Therefore, despite the external army's attempts at diversion, the brunt of the fighting was borne by the internals in the *wilayas*<sup>38</sup> and as a result they suffered heavy losses. At the end of the war these men only commanded small forces, some estimate only 6 000 in the entire country. They regarded with disdain the external army who spent most of the war in Tunisia and Morocco.<sup>39</sup>

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36. A. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, op. cit., 133.

37. Ibid. 135.

38. Library of Congress, op. cit.

39. D. and M. Ottaway, op. cit., 15.

In 1960 Boumedienne, the future leader of the 1965 coup, became chief of staff of the external army and consolidated his power within it. The 1 200 men in Tunisia under the control of Mohamedi Said had degenerated into anarchy. Within this chaos young soldiers had taken to mugging and harassing locals. One of Boumedienne's first acts was to have twenty of these men shot dead in front of the troops. Trouble on the Moroccan border where Captain Zoubir led an insurrection was also effectively crushed. To prevent further indiscipline Boumedienne introduced tough deputies of his own.<sup>40</sup> Thus, through instilling fear and discipline Boumedienne brought the external army firmly under his control.

### 2.3.1.3 Conclusion

From the events discussed above it is clear that grievances and rivalries were always present within the ALN. The grievances were not limited to hostility between the external and internal army, but were also evident among *wilaya* commanders and commanders of the external army. Moreover, assassinations and eradication of opposition by the ALN were methods utilised by the FLN to maintain its control over the war of liberation. These techniques would be employed after independence and again in the current conflict.

### 2.3.2.1 The French Army

*We want to halt the decadence of the West and the March of Communism. That is our duty, the real duty of the army. That is why we must win the war in Algeria. Indo-China taught us to see the truth.*

Colonel Antoine Argoud, November 1960<sup>41</sup>

An analysis of the Algerian military is incomplete without understanding the beliefs and behaviour of the French army during the war of liberation. Its commitment to keeping

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40. A. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, op. cit., 412.

41. A. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, op. cit., 165.

Algeria French, its use of torture and eventual coup attempt, are manifested in altered contexts and reframed ideologies in subsequent Algerian history.

Possibly the most important reason for the desperate attempts to hold onto Algeria while the rest of Africa gained its independence was the fact that in 1848 the fateful step was taken to declare Algeria an integral part of France. Central to this was the fact that the French army was to make a promise of fidelity to *Algeria Francaise* in large part owing to its defeat in Southeast Asia.<sup>42</sup>

Many soldiers came down with *la mal jaune* – army parlance for the spell Vietnam had cast over them. The women and landscape of Vietnam won the hearts and minds of the soldiers, and they swore they would never leave. The soldiers had lost touch with their own homeland. They felt estranged from France and its people. The French Communist Party's opposition to the war further deepened this sense of estrangement. The army had been in Vietnam since 1945, but it was the spring of 1954 with the siege of Dien Bien Phu, which determined the victors of the war. Within eight weeks the French capitulated.<sup>43</sup> The army believed that conniving politicians, disinterested civilians and a traitorous Communist Party had aided its downfall. As the French set sail for France, Vietnamese they had promised never to abandon lined the shore, viewing them with contempt and hurt. Some swam to the departing ships, begging to be taken along. Those who watched swore they would never allow anything like this to happen again.<sup>44</sup> It was these soldiers who were sent to Algeria and who took with them their resentment, their feeling of estrangement and lessons learnt in ill-fated Southeast Asia.<sup>45</sup>

The French army's failure in Indo-China necessitated a victory in Algeria. Although its victory in 1957 in The Battle of Algiers signalled a military defeat for the FLN, it could probably not have been won without resort to institutionalised torture. Moreover, the belief that the French government was mistaken in relinquishing Algeria and the resultant

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42. A. Horne, *The French Army in Politics, 1870-1970*, London, Macmillan London Ltd, 1984, 67-92.

43. J. Talbot, *The War Without a Name: France in Algeria 1954-1962*, New York, Alfred A. Knopf, 1980, 6.

44. Ibid. 7.

45. Ibid. 10.

failed coup in April 1961, displayed the first visible signs in Algeria that a military is prepared to act contrary to civilian government commands. What was clear in the case of the French Army on Algerian soil was its assessment of the legitimacy of the regime it served.<sup>46</sup> It was determined not to relinquish *Algeria Francaise*.

### 2.3.2.2 Torture

An analysis of the use of torture both before and after independence is instructive because it has its source at the hands of the French during the war of independence and is reframed in the hands of the Algerian military elite in the context of the current conflict.

Although the use of torture only became pronounced during the Battle of Algiers, when the FLN began to bomb areas in the city, both Ben Khedda and Francois Mitterand confirmed the use of torture before 1956. A letter written by a soldier, long before the Battle of Algiers, recounts his experience of the torture of two Arabs by gendarmes and evidences the use of torture before 1956.

The first of the tortures consisted of suspending the two men completely naked by their feet, their hands bound behind their backs, and plunging their heads for a long time into a bucket of water to make them talk. The second torture consisted of suspending them, their hands and feet tied behind their backs, this time with their head upwards. Underneath them was placed a trestle, and they were made to swing, by fist blows, in such a fashion that their sexual parts rubbed against the very sharp pointed bar of the trestle. The only comment made by the men, turning towards the soldiers present: "I am ashamed to find myself stark naked in front of you."<sup>47</sup>

Although attempts were made to cover up the extent of the torture especially during the Battle of Algiers, reports of torture were numerous. In Vidal-Naquet's famous book on

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46. A. Home, *The French Army in Politics, 1870-1970*, op. cit., 78.

47. Ibid. 203.

terrorism in Algeria, he cites the killing by suffocation in March 1957 of forty-one out of one hundred and one detainees locked in wine cellars in Oran.<sup>48</sup> The methods of torture were brutal and varied. Often electrodes were placed on areas of the body most notably the penis and the victim repeatedly shocked. There were also forms of water torture. Heads were repeatedly thrust into water troughs or the body filled with water through the mouth with the nose blocked. Finally, the tortures that degraded the victims such as thrusting bottles into the vaginas of young women, high pressure hoses inserted into the rectum.<sup>49</sup> It is estimated that between thirty and forty percent of the entire male population of the Casbah was arrested and tortured during the Battle of Algiers.<sup>50</sup> This form of institutionalised torture would rear its ugly head once again during the conflict which has plagued the country since 1992.

### 2.3.2.3 Conclusion

The use of terror by the French army during the war of liberation and its successful use could have disposed the Algerian military to its effectiveness as a means of fighting opposition. Moreover, as will be illustrated, the forms of terror used during the civil war mirrors those used by the French. The resilience displayed by the French army during the war and its continued fighting once the French government had capitulated illustrated the self-defined political aspirations the French military had adopted. Its contempt of what it perceived as its treacherous government was a sign that the French military would act contrary to the wishes of its leaders. This same belief that the military would act against a civilian government is reflected in the Algerian army in subsequent events.

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48. Ibid. 203-206.

49. Ibid. 200.

50. Ibid. 199.



## 2.4 Independent Algeria

### 2.5 Introduction

This section discusses the reigns of Ben Bella, Boumedienne and Benjedid. It illustrates the continued use of violence to eradicate opposition and the dominant role the military elite begins to play.

#### 2.5.1 Independence Achieved

The war raged for nearly eight years and independence for Algeria was finally achieved in 1962, not through military defeat of the French, but through a myriad of factors. External political pressure from the external FLN and the international community; guerrilla warfare inside and the external army; political internal resistance and resistance from some French groups at home, all played their part in finally ensuring independence for Algeria. Moreover, the fact remains that a war waged against Arab nationalism in the age of decolonisation was an ill-fated war. Ageron in his book *Modern Algeria* writes that beyond the usual reasons afforded for finally deciding to relinquish Algeria, the French needed to understand that although Algeria had been conquered, the Muslims of Algeria never gave up the struggle. Although they had been vanquished they would never give in. The Algerians throughout the occupation repeated what the tribe of the Hachem had said to the French in 1841:

This land is the land of the Arabs. You are no more than passing guests. Even if you stay here for three hundred years like the Turks, you will still have to leave!<sup>51</sup>

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51. C-R. Ageron, op. cit., 128.

### 2.5.2 Internal fighting

At independence the rivalries which existed during the war between various political and military groups became more pronounced as various factions vied for power. Fighting broke out near Constantine between the political commissary Major Si Larbi, and commander-in-chief, Colonel Saout el-Arab of *Wilaya* Two (Constantine). Si Larbi acted primarily out of personal ambition, but since both were siding with different factions, the fighting assumed national significance. The actions of these men brought *wilaya* forces into conflict. The commanders of *Wilaya* Five (Oran), *Wilaya* One (Aures Mountains) and *Wilaya* Six (Sahara) supported the external leadership. This was not fortuitous. During the war these *wilayas* had been well supplied by the external army, since they were closest to the frontiers. The *wilayas* of *Wilaya* Three (Kabylia) and *Wilaya* Four (Algiers) were isolated and their commanders embittered by the shortage of arms and provisions which should have come from outside. Nonetheless, some *wilaya* leaders were acting to maintain the fiefdoms they had procured during the war and which they wished to maintain after independence.<sup>52</sup>

Many of the *wilaya* commanders also believed their authority and power would be depleted especially once conversion took place. The principle of conversion entailed some military men resuming civilian life while others would form part of the national army. Some commanders refused to accept the conversion in its entirety and issued the following statement,

To consider the ALN an army that must go back to the barracks is to forget the real sense of the struggle that it has carried on alongside the people. To attack the problem of conversion from the top, that is to dissolve the *wilaya* commands, means to push aside the militants, thus leaving the door open to opportunists and those who collaborated with the colonial regime. The

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52. D. and M. Ottaway, op. cit., 21.

wilaya commands will remain in power until the formation of an Algerian government legally approved by the people.<sup>53</sup>

Fighting once again erupted and on a large scale. The Algerian people were shocked and appalled. In the year of independence on September 1, a crowd of about twenty thousand people stormed the *Palais d'Ete*, the French General's former summer residence, shouting "*Baraket es-Senin!*" – "Seven years of war are enough!" In the country around Aumale, Boghari and Tairat, peasants flung themselves in the line of fire in order to stop the fighting which had engulfed them for years, crying "*Baraket Dirigeants!*" – "Enough, Leaders!" However, it was the troops of the external army, led by Boumedienne that ended the fighting. This was sadly achieved at the expense of several hundred ALN soldiers who had fought for the liberation of their country. In the fight for control, these men died at the hands of their own brothers. Boumedienne gave his support unconditionally to the external faction led by Ben Bella.<sup>54</sup>

### 2.5.3 The Reign of Ben Bella

Ben Bella was appointed Prime Minister of Algeria in 1962 and in the subsequent year elected president of Algeria. He set about establishing Algeria's socialist state, but scandals and corruption infused his regime and ultimately led to his downfall. One by one former colleagues fell by the wayside or were purged. Ferhat Abbas, a prominent member of the FLN who had helped Ben Bella to power disagreed with Ben Bella's anti-western policies and was expelled from the FLN. In 1963 Khider resigned from the post of secretary-general of the FLN. Within days Ben Bella's Foreign Secretary Mohamed Khemisti was assassinated. In June of the same year Boudiaf was arrested on Ben Bella's orders and Ait Ahmed declared he would fight Ben Bella announcing publicly "Are we in a country of Duvelier .....or are we in Algeria?". He then took to the mountains with the former Kabyle leader Colonel Mohand Ou el Hadj. By the end of the year Ben Bella was

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53. Ibid. 22.

54. Ibid. 23.

at war over territorial rights with the King of Morocco or the *roi fantoche, un criminel* as he was referred to by Ben Bella.<sup>55</sup>

In 1964 Ben Bella's residence came under fire, and armed revolt broke out around Biskra led by Colonel Chaabani. Ait Ahmed and Khider supported the revolt, with the latter declaring that the regime was slipping dangerously towards fascism and totalitarianism. With the aid of Boumedienne's troops, Chaabani was rounded up and executed and Ait Ahmed imprisoned. Khider fled to Switzerland, together with the FLN treasury so painstakingly collected from Algerians in France and at home during the war. He was followed into exile by Abbas and Bitat, and others of the old guard.<sup>56</sup>

It was during this period that Ben Bella came to depend progressively more on the support of Boumedienne and the army. Despite his integral part played in Ben Bella's victory, Boumedienne remained in the background. It appears that at this stage his only ambition was to make the newly established *Armée Nationale Populaire* (ANP) a powerful and united army.<sup>57</sup> This task presented great difficulties as it required merging hostile forces such as the guerrilla commanders, the outside army and those who had professional training in the French army. This task was compounded by Ben Bella playing off rivalries between guerrilla colonels and Boumedienne in order to weaken the latter's position. Ben Bella appointed Tahar Zbiri, a *wilaya* commander, Chief of the General Staff in order to undermine Boumedienne's position and to placate dissatisfied *wilaya* leaders. Boumedienne was not consulted about the appointment and was negotiating an arms deal with the Russians at the time. He apparently learnt about the appointment from his hosts. He stated subsequently: "[Ben Bella] knew perfectly well...that I would have viewed favourably the nomination of brother Tahar...[but] he waited for me to leave in order to make brother Tahar believe that he had been named against my will...Ben Bella never ceased to describe us [Zbiri and Boumedienne] to each

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55. A. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, op. cit., 541.

56. Ibid. 541.

57. D. and M. Ottaway, op. cit., 178.

other as sworn enemies.”<sup>58</sup> As a result of Ben Bella’s machinations and Boumedienne’s policy of favouring French trained officers over the former guerrilla commanders, the army remained divided.<sup>59</sup>

With most of Ben Bella’s rivals dead, in prison, or exiled, he finally felt a sense of security. It is therefore ironic that in June 1965 the same man who had helped him into power dethroned him of that power. Although himself under sentence of death by Ben Bella, Ait Ahmed warned him that there would be coup against him. The following statement issued by Boumedienne to the Algerian people presents the overt reason for the coup,

“The ANP will never let it be cut off from the people, from whom it finds both its strength and reason for being.” “he [Ben Bella] made us look like bloodthirsty men.” “The execution of this vile plot and diabolical idea was to be reinforced on the political level by the denigration of the *junud* of the Army of Liberation by calling them ‘militarists’ and ‘fascists.’ In fact our *junud* are simply the sons of *fellahin* and of workers who have fought to recover their lands and their factories...I am not simply talking of the soldiers in general, the majority of the poor *fellahin* and workers who possess nothing; I am speaking of the officers, who have the same doctrine and the same orientation as the Party and the country, that is, who should conform to the policies of the country.” “We are not an army of mercenaries. We are above all militants, children of *fellahin* and workers, intellectuals and nationalists worthy of the name...[We] are the people, [we] are the Revolution...If [the army] rose up again to straighten out deviationism, ...this cannot be called a military coup d’etat. All they did was to assume their revolutionary responsibilities towards the people.”<sup>60</sup>

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58. D. and M. Ottaway, op. cit., 178.

59. Ibid. 17.

60. W. Zartman, *Man, State and Society in the Contemporary Maghreb*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1973, 217.

The reasons for the coup were numerous, ranging from the preservation of the ideologies of the revolution, to corruption and the bitter animosity that had developed between the two men. Boumedienne had at last arrived.<sup>61</sup>

#### 2.5.4 The Reign of Boumedienne

*Obsessed with order and careful never to interfere with a task once it is given, he is incapable of arbitrating or settling administrative conflicts. An enemy of official abuse, he nevertheless depends on the military and police apparatus that is fostering repression and despotism; a stickler for law, he signs orders for judicial reforms that wipe out in a single stroke what was left of justice...Because he is better suited to command than to govern Boumedienne is a prisoner of his personality, of his past and of the men around him.*

Hervé Bourguès<sup>62</sup>

After the coup of 1965 Boumedienne established the Council of Revolution. The council was comprised of twenty-six men, mostly army officers and former *wilaya* leaders. Twelve of these men at the time either belonged to the ANP general staff, or were commanders of military regions.<sup>63</sup> All but two had been members of the ALN.<sup>64</sup> The core or Oudja Group of this council consisted of Boumedienne's war time associates, Ahmed Kaid, Cherif Belgasem, Ahmed Medeghri, and Abdelaziz Bouteflika.<sup>65</sup> This at least created a cohesive internal governing elite.

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61. A. Horne, *A Savage War of Peace*, op. cit., 540-541.

62. W.B. Quandt, *Revolution and Political Leadership: Algeria, 1954-1968*, Cambridge, The Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 1969, 262.

63. Library of Congress, op. cit.

64. W. Zartman, op. cit., 25.

65. D. and M. Ottaway, op. cit., 192.

In mid December 1967, ex guerrilla commander Tahar Zbiri, one of Boumedienne's accomplices in the 1965 coup, fearing that the revolutionary fighters would be replaced by newly hired technicians attempted to overthrow the government.<sup>66</sup> The rebellion was squashed within hours. Boumedienne used the opportunity to remove all guerrilla fighters from positions of authority. To further consolidate his control over the ANP, he dissolved the general staff and assumed many of the staff responsibilities.<sup>67</sup>

During Boumedienne's reign Khider, who had fled with the FLN treasury, was assassinated in Madrid in 1967.<sup>68</sup> Krim, who went into exile after the coup which brought Boumedienne into power, formed an opposition group and publicly announced that "seven years of independence have been worse than seven years of war". He was condemned to death *in absentia* for treason and accused of attempting to overthrow Boumedienne. Although he always travelled well armed, after the Palestinian hijacking of a plane in the autumn of 1970, airport security was increased. His revolver, which he always carried with him, was confiscated at an airport. In October 1970 he was found strangled to death in a hotel room in Frankfurt.<sup>69</sup> Boumedienne's elimination of any opposition extended beyond the borders of Algeria and the assassinations were probably performed by the *Securite Militaire*. Its members, trained by eastern European friends of Algeria, earned a reputation for ruthlessly pursuing dissidents inside and outside the regime.<sup>70</sup>

Boumedienne constantly asserted that the socialist state of Algeria was not the instrument of a military regime or an officer caste and he and his top aides never appeared in public in military uniform. Nonetheless, many experienced military personnel entered ministries as part of the national elite. Moreover, military management also played a part in civic-

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66. E. Hermassi, op. cit., 167.

67. Library of Congress, op. cit.

68. B. Madani, 2001 May, Algeria: Stronghold of Le Pouvoir, *Middle East Intelligence Bulletin*, 3 (5).

69. World Amazigh Action Coalition, op. cit.

70. M. Stone, *The Agony of Algeria*, London, Hurst and Company, 1997, 136.

action and economic development projects, and regional commanders often became more influential in local affairs than the governors of certain regions.<sup>71</sup>

Under Boumedienne, by 1972 ninety percent of the Algerian army had been equipped with Soviet sources. Initially the army was filled with ALN members, but later in the 1970s a younger technocratic officer class was beginning to replace them. Although many of them trained abroad in France, the Soviet Union and some even in the United States, Algeria itself had some prestigious military schools, such as Cherchell, the former French officer school. Boumedienne gradually replaced conservative, older commanders with younger officers.<sup>72</sup>

The Council of Revolution was dissolved late in 1968. In the early 1970's only nine of its past members were still active in government, although all with military backgrounds and three of them were still in military command. Of the Oudja group only Abdelaziz Bouteflika remained.<sup>73</sup> However, throughout this period an army watchdog remained made up of top colonels who were also senior men in military affairs. This group included most of the former members of the Council of Revolution, notably the commanders of the military regions. When Boumedienne suddenly became ill, the remaining members of the Council of Revolution were re-awakened to oversee the power transformation. This group, backed by the army, made the firm decision to guarantee that the succession would follow the correct constitutional procedures and that the successor would be acceptable to the army, for the sole purpose of averting a military coup.<sup>74</sup>

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71. Library of Congress, op. cit.

72. M. Stone, op. cit., 130-131.

73. W. Zartman, op. cit., 26.

74. Ibid. 28.



### 2.5.5 The Reign of Benjedid

When Benjedid came into power in 1979, he consolidated his authority by eliminating all serious contenders from the government sphere.<sup>75</sup> His new regime was nonetheless dominated by a military elite. Unlike Boumedienne, Benjedid's military elite did not dominate the government as a single conspiratorial group, but rather as a guardian of the regime and a reservoir of personnel. The members of this elite dominated because they were close to Benjedid and had worked with him before. There appeared to be three requirements for membership in Benjedid's entourage, none however were necessary or sufficient conditions, but these conditions did facilitate entry. They involved: origin in the Annaba-Constantine region, experience in the French army and service in the Oranais region.<sup>76</sup> The army therefore reverted to its guardian role, but left a powerful group of its leaders around Benjedid whose entire career was in active military service.<sup>77</sup>

Benjedid's rule was infused with coercion and force as methods of maintaining control. Protests were dealt with harshly when the regime believed they were getting out of hand. This was especially true with regard to Amazigh and Islamist demonstrations. In 1982, following repeated protests by Islamists, the government suppressed and arrested the Islamist leaders. The establishment by Amazigh individuals of the Algerian League of Human Rights in 1986 was short-lived and its members also arrested and imprisoned.<sup>78</sup> Accusations of corruption were used against troublesome political figures, such as Bouteflika. The Algerians popularly proclaimed the Court of Accounts, used to handle matters of corruption, the Court for Settling Accounts. Furthermore, once Benjedid took control regular arrests without charges took place. One of these arrests included Ali Yahya, a respected lawyer and former minister. The use of the judicial system as a method of gaining control showed that the regime would use all methods to maintain domination and defend itself.<sup>79</sup>

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75. J.L. Esposito, and J.O. Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1996, 66.

76. W. Zartman, *op. cit.*, 36.

77. *Ibid.* 42.

78. H. Roberts, *Radical Islamism and the Dilemma of Algerian Nationalism*, *Third World Quarterly*, 10 (2), 1988, 588.

79. *Ibid.* 31-32.

In the mid 1980s Algeria, whose oil revenues accounted for 90% of its exports, felt the crippling impact of the oil glut and falling energy prices. This failure of the state-run economy, because of the oil crisis, a growing national debt of about 24 billion dollars and a 30% inflation rate, had a severe effect on all aspects of life. As a result tensions worsened between the ruling elite and the majority of the population who felt the impact of the austerity measures that the ruling minority implemented.<sup>80</sup> Benjedid progressively abandoned Boumedienne's socialist economic project in favour of a more liberalised economy which inevitably led to job losses as the overmanned, inefficient state industries were streamlined. These redundancies added to an already serious unemployment rate in Algeria. A further contributing factor was the country's high birth rate. During 1980-1984 the population grew from 18.3 million to 21.6 million. In 1986 it was estimated that almost 75% of Algerians between the ages of 16-25 were unemployed.<sup>81</sup> Food shortages increased and government inefficiency and corruption worsened. The youth were especially vocal in expressing their discontent with the growing inequality. The slogans chanted by youths during international football matches attended by high ranking government officials, provide evidence of their disenchantment. Chants such as "A room, a kitchen is better than the castle of Halima" (President Benjedid's wife) were proclaimed, and "For us, only Artane (an anti-Parkinson's disease drug popular with the poor); or Al-zetla (cannabis) or exile".<sup>82</sup>

On October 4, 1988 about 5 000 youths went on a rampage in Bab el-Oued, an overcrowded, poverty stricken suburb of Algiers. The demonstrators were protesting high unemployment, lack of basic consumer goods and affordable housing in cities. They destroyed centres of prestige such as the Blue Note night-club, the Ryad el-Feth shopping centre, the rendezvous of the sons and daughters of the elite, the *chi-chis*. The violence continued for three days until the government imposed a state of siege on October 7 and gave permission to the army to shoot on sight and to use automatic weapons. Despite the presence of the army, the riots spread to Oran, Annaba, Mostaganem, Blida and many

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80. J.L. Esposito, and J.O. Voll, op. cit., 154.

81. M. Willis, *Islamist Challenge in Algeria*, New York, New York University Press, 1996, 99.

82. M. Vergis, Genesis of Mobilisation: The Young Activists of Algeria's Islamic Salvation Front, In *Political Islam*, Joel Benin and Joe Stork, Eds, Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1997, 296.

other towns and cities across the country. The number killed ranged between 200-500. Over 3 500 people were arrested and a large number tortured. On October 10, 100 protesters gathered at the *Place de Martyrs* in central Algiers to hear Ali Belhadj, a young influential and charismatic preacher speak. The meeting was deemed an illegal Islamist gathering and the security forces opened fire on the crowd killing forty people. Algerians were stunned by the display of force which finally and definitively destroyed the myth of the military as the symbol of the honourable guarantor of the revolution.<sup>83</sup>

## 2.6 Conclusion

Algerian society has been habituated to the use of violence ever since they gained independence in a violent war. A pattern of purges, assassinations and killings appear to mark the behaviour of the Algerian governing elite. Ben Bella purged his regime of those who opposed him. Boumedienne lessened any opposition to his rule through purges at home and where necessary abroad following largely in the footsteps of his predecessor, but with more success. Benjedid similarly followed in the footsteps of his predecessors by dealing forcibly with opposition, most notably Islamist and Amazigh opposition and finally with the economically underprivileged. The successive leaders of independent Algeria, with the exception of Ben Bella whose reign was short-lived, came from the military and an elite military group has always been present throughout, as Boumedienne's Council of Revolution and Oudja group and Benjedid's inner circle.

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83. M. Stone, op. cit., 64-66.

### 3. THE CONFLICT

*In the name of democracy, you have cancelled elections. In the name of human rights and western-style modernity you have adopted the methods of terror, allowed not long ago by Guy Mollet and Francois Mitterand...mass arrests, arbitrary internment, systematic torture. It is from Vichy you borrowed the 'special courts' and the monstrous principle of retroactive application of the penal law. You will try to deny me the right to proclaim the truth: you have turned torturers or torturers' accomplices. You could not have a worse fate pity you...*

Jacques Verges-French lawyer and member of the FLN during the war of liberation<sup>84</sup>

#### 3.1 Introduction

The following chapter deals with the conflict which followed the 1992 coup. This chapter is similarly divided into sections in order to create a more coherent portrayal of the conflict. The first deals with the conflict and the participants generally. The second focuses more specifically on the military as a participant. The third deals with the behaviour of the military during the conflict, and finally, the fourth section discusses the international support for the Algerian military elite.

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84. J. Verges, *Letter to Algerian Friends, Friends who have Turned Torturers*, [Online], Available: <http://www.aliasoft.com/themes/alger.html>, [19 December 2002], 2000.

## 3.2 The Conflict and its Participants

### 3.2.1 Introduction

When the 1988 riots were over, President Benjedid met with Muslim leaders, who forcibly condemned acts of violence and sabotage and submitted proposals for economic and social reform based on Islamic principles. In February 1989 a new constitution was voted in by a national referendum and amongst its most notable features was the complete elimination of any reference to socialism or socialist principles.<sup>85</sup> Other constitutional changes included, amongst others, unrestricted freedoms of expression, association, and organisation found in Article 39 of the constitution; the right to unionise and strike in Articles 53 and 54 and most importantly the right to form “associations of a political nature” found in Article 40. The last mentioned provision established a multiparty system that was formally entrenched in the enabling law of July 5, 1989. It had taken only nine months to transform the single party authoritarian Algerian regime into a multi-party, pluralistic state. Approximately 30 political parties were officially recognised and registered.<sup>86</sup> The introduction of multi-party elections in 1989 saw the emergence of the *Front Islamique du Salut* (FIS) an Islamist group.

### 3.2.2 The Role of Islam pre-1989

In the first chapter reference was made to the AUMA under the leadership of Ben Badis. During the fight for independence the AUMA was subsumed under the banner of the FLN, but once independence was achieved this union broke down. Despite its presence in the independence struggle, a leading role after independence could not be achieved. The dominance of the FLN could be attributed to the fact that the AUMA had retained its religious and cultural character and was unable to consolidate a separate political framework. Alistair Horne attributed the political eclipse of the AUMA to the fact that its leadership was unsuited to political activism because, “tied up in their theological coils,

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85. J. Entilis, *Algeria: The Revolution Institutionalized*, Kent, Croom Helm Ltd, 1986, 228.

86. Ibid. 229.

they failed to find pragmatic applications for their doctrines.”<sup>87</sup> As a result the FLN came into power and the Popular Republic of Algeria was formed. The failure of the AUMA to concretise its doctrine was a problem that the subsequent manifestations of Islamist groups in Algeria also experienced.

Although their ideas were essentially secular and socialist, both Ben Bella and Boumedienne realised that an Islamic cultural component would help achieve national synthesis.<sup>88</sup> As a result both worked towards showing support for the Arabisation of the country. The schools were slowly Arabised and religious education was instituted at school. Boumedienne also held a constitutional and presidential referendum and endorsed the New National Charter of 1976, which gave Islam the status of state religion. In March of the same year gambling was outlawed and in August, Friday replaced Saturday as the official weekly holiday.<sup>89</sup> In 1964 Ben Bella also authorised the creation of the Qiyam (Values) Association to lobby Islamic issues in the educational, linguistic, and cultural spheres. However, when the Qiyam Association stepped into the political sphere in 1970 by protesting the execution of Sayyid Qutb of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, it was shut down.<sup>90</sup>

The Arabisation afforded Islam more prominence and therefore the belief that the Islamic voice could become more vocal. However, the secularist regime was not prepared to give Islam any political power. Therefore, as soon as the Qiyam Association entered the political realm, it was shut down. The regime was sending a clear message- we will take cognisance of the importance of Islam, but it can never be a political force. The suppression of Islamists would continue under Boumedienne’s successor Benjedid, and would reach its zenith after the coup of 1992.

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87. Ibid. 32.

88. J. Ruedy, Continuities and Discontinuities in Algerian Confrontation with Europe, In *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa*, John Ruedy and John Douglas, Eds, New York, St Martins Press, 1994, 79.

89. M. Willis, op. cit., 46.

90. Ibid. 80.

### 3.2.3 *Front Islamique du Salut*

The FIS was an umbrella organisation established in 1989 under the leadership of Shaykh Ali Abbasi Madani, a moderate, religious, Western educated professor at the University of Algiers, and Ali Belhadj, a more religiously radical and younger man.

Abbasi Madani, the son of an imam, was born in south-eastern Algeria. He was a member of the FLN and was imprisoned for eight years during the French occupation, and for four years under Benjedid. In 1978, Madani received a British doctorate in education and taught at the University of Algiers where once again he became politically active. He condemned outright the government's failures and advocated an Islamic alternative. He was arrested and imprisoned for two years for his political activism. Later, when the government liberalised its stance towards the Islamists, Madani and other Islamists were able to preach and organise in mosques, schools and universities.<sup>91</sup> Madani was critical of the FLN, however, he projected an image of reason and was moderate in his discourse. He was furthermore, publicly supportive of democratic elections and pluralism. Belhadj, on the other hand, lost both parents in the war of independence, was the product of Islamist religious education and as a result was more confrontational in his rhetoric. He followed a pure Islamist line based on Sharia law.<sup>92</sup>

This dichotomy within the FIS led to splits within the party between those who advocated following the democratic process and those that believed that the democratic process was incompatible with Islam. Furthermore, the FIS failed to formulate a political programme, instead its platform was based on the economic failure, corruption and inefficiencies of the FLN government. Once it had successfully won the municipal and provincial elections, the FIS began to clean up in certain municipalities and provinces. In Tipaza, west of Algiers FIS councillors banned shorts and swimwear in the streets although this ban was later repealed. Some councillors also forbade the selling of alcohol, mixed sex

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91. M. Willis, op. cit., 157.

92. Ibid. 158.

education and the popular form of raï music in certain areas. These actions indicated that the FIS was embarking on a moral crusade in Algeria.<sup>93</sup>

On May 25, 1991 on the eve of the general legislative elections, the FIS called for an indefinite nation-wide strike. Rallies and marches were organised in response to alleged government gerrymandering tactics. As a result clashes ensued with security forces who fired openly on protesters. A curfew was imposed and both Madani and Belhadj were jailed. On December 26, elections were held with the FIS winning a landslide victory.<sup>94</sup>

As the FIS prepared for the second round of elections, its Islamist agenda became more pronounced with pamphlets on issues of women and Islam focusing on more orthodox roles of the woman as wife and mother and the obligation to wear the headscarf. However, the incongruencies of the FIS stance remained evident, with structural changes in cities which included cinemas and exceptions to the orthodox role women should play for professional women and those who were divorced or widowed.<sup>95</sup>

#### 3.2.4 The Coup

On January 12, 1992, the Algerian military, disregarding the majority of voters, intervened in what was a de facto coup to prevent the FIS from taking its rightful position in government. The coup was planned by senior military officials including, most notably Khaled Nezzar, then Minister of Defence, the commanders of the military regions, the leaders of the navy, the gendarmerie and security forces.<sup>96</sup> In the name of security preservation and stability these men, aware that the FIS was poised for another electoral victory that would have afforded them a two-thirds to 80% majority victory in parliament, acted. They forced President Benjedid to resign thereby creating a

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93. M. Stone, op. cit., 167.

94. M.-J. Deeb, *Militant Islam and the Politics of Redemption*, In *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Charles E Butterworth and William Zartman, Eds, Newbury Park, Sage Publications, 1992, 56-57.

95. M. Stone, op. cit., 172.

96. M. Willis, op. cit., 247.



constitutional crisis, which the military elite would use as pretence to annul the elections.<sup>97</sup>

Although the formulators of the coup had planned to utilise the proper provisions of the Constitution to legitimise the coup, the consequences of such an action would not have been in their favour. Once Benjedid resigned, his successor would be the president of the National Assembly, Abdelaziz Belkhadem, who was perceived as far too sympathetic towards the FIS. However, they remained anxious to preserve what Francois Burgat terms, 'a legalistic façade'. They therefore planned that when Benjedid resigned, he would cede power to the *Haut Comité Sécurité* (HCS) which would appoint his successor. The legal façade was that the HCS was a body already in existence and provided for by the Constitution.<sup>98</sup> The HCS immediately declared a state of emergency, annulled the December election results, cancelled the second round and further elections were postponed indefinitely. On February 9, 1992 the military onslaught began. Journalists, whether Islamist or not, were jailed and most newspaper agencies were closed. In March 1992, the FIS was banned. Leaders, members and those sympathetic to the FIS cause were arrested and tortured. It is estimated that more than 10 000 Islamists were detained in concentration camps in the Sahara. Mosques and social welfare centres set up by the FIS were closed. Imams that had shown any signs of sympathy for the plight of the FIS were arrested for using the pulpit for political purposes.<sup>99</sup>

The HCS subsequently set up the *Haut Comité d'Etat* (HCE), a five member transitional body that would act as a collective presidency. The HCE mirrored the Council of Revolution established by Boumedienne in 1965 to legitimise his coup. Boudiaf, a wartime FLN political operator, was selected to chair the HCE. Ben Bella had forced him into exile in 1963-4 because of political disagreements. However, his status as a wartime hero and absence during the crisis at the start of independence and in 1992 made him a suitable candidate. Nonetheless, maintaining effective control was General Khaled

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97. J. Entelis, Islam, Democracy, and the State: The Reemergence of Authoritarian Politics in Algeria, In *Islamism and Secularism in North Africa*, John Ruedy and John Douglas, Eds, New York, St Martins Press, 1994, 219.

98. M. Willis, op. cit., 249.

99. J.L. Esposito, and J.O. Voll, op. cit., 166.

Nezzar, the most powerful member of the HCE, once again illustrating the power grip the military had on Algeria.<sup>100</sup> Boudiaf's reign was short-lived. His anti-corruption stance threatened the privileged and he was assassinated on June 29, 1992 shortly after coming into power.<sup>101</sup> The authorities protected the culprits and the assassination was never satisfactorily explained much the same as those of early FLN leaders such as Mohamed Khider and Krim Belkacem.<sup>102</sup> In August 1992 the HCE passed legislation allowing the army extensive powers to deal with terrorists and insurgents and in October 1992 Nezzar appointed a group of young generals to root out the terrorists.<sup>103</sup> The re-appearance of torture was an inescapable consequence of the HCE's anti-terrorist campaign.<sup>104</sup> In 1994 the HCE called for a 'national consensus conference' to establish a new transitional government and to choose a president. And, as the army had chosen Benjedid to succeed Boumedienne, so too did the committee chose one of its own, Lamine Zeroual, Minister of Defence to lead the country.<sup>105</sup>

The more precise reasons afforded for the intervention were: the protection of Algeria from economic turmoil; radical Islam; and collapse into civil war. For many senior officers a FIS government meant disaster, both politically and economically for the Algeria they had pledged to defend.<sup>106</sup> In addition, the governments of North African countries had met several months earlier and had already rationalised the groundwork for intervention to combat radical Islam.<sup>107</sup> The military elite also feared that the fragile economic conditions of the country would worsen if the FIS came into power. The national debt had reached an estimated \$25 billion in 1991 and this the leaders of the coup believed would double through capital flight and the withdrawal of foreign petrol companies. Of more immediate concern was the fact that there were already indications that opponents of the FIS were preparing for an armed struggle against the Islamic

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100. M. Stone, *op. cit.*, 103.

101. *Ibid.* 109.

102. *Ibid.* 109-110.

103. *Ibid.* 110.

104. *Ibid.* 103-115.

105. *Ibid.* 116.

106. M. Willis, *op. cit.*, 245.

107. J.L. Esposito, and J.O. Voll, *op. cit.*, 166.

government and therefore the threat of a civil war could not be ruled out.<sup>108</sup> The Amazigh stronghold of Kabylia was the only area in which the FIS failed to triumph in the 1991 elections. The FIS was viewed as posing a threat to Kabylia interests, which centred on demands for recognition of Tamazight as an official language alongside Arabic, the right to promote their culture, and secularism.<sup>109</sup>

However, of overwhelming concern was the fact that the military elite was anxious about its own integrity and survival if the FIS achieved a majority in the National Assembly. The military elite feared that the FIS would try to neutralise its traditional foes in the general staff of the military. The FIS's declaration that it would secure the release of all of its members and supporters arrested in the June 1991 uprising and prosecuted by the military court, indicated a clear challenge to the all-important authority of the military.<sup>110</sup> Indeed, the FIS made it clear that it would not tolerate army interference in domestic politics under any circumstances. Abbasi Madani, actually warned the army not to,

descend onto the streets. If one drop of blood should be spilled, I swear to God that we will fight the army to its complete destruction.<sup>111</sup>

Madani also espoused socialist rhetoric which threatened the economic interest of the military elite. The military elite therefore felt that if it was to block an FIS victory it had to do so before the second round of elections.

Since negotiations failed to restore the FIS to power, disillusioned members of the FIS decided to take up arms. The group they established became known as the *Arme Islamique du Salut* (AIS).<sup>112</sup> Other groups with their own agendas were formed amidst the chaos. The pervasive repression and torture were salient factors in spearheading

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108. M. Willis, op. cit., 245.

109. B. Maddy Weitzman, Islamic Challenge in North Africa, *Terrorism and Political Violence*, 8 (1-2), 1996, 183.

110. M. Willis, op. cit., 245.

111. J. Entelis, op. cit., 239.

112. Its formation is discussed more comprehensively later.

extremist guerrilla groups in Algeria.<sup>113</sup> In addition, the manifest failure of the FIS's 'legalist' strategy strengthened the conviction of more radical Islamist groups that had remained outside the party that only an armed struggle could bring down the regime.<sup>114</sup> The most dominant extremist group was the *Group Islamique Arme* (GIA), which had as its objective the establishment of an Islamic state.<sup>115</sup> The group's methods of attack were and remain brutal, focusing not only on military personnel, but also civilians who failed to ascribe to its notion of Islam. However, allegations remain rife that the military infiltrated the GIA and was responsible for the violence it perpetrated.<sup>116</sup>

The GIA was initially formed by Mansour Meliani, who used the name for three small groups he had brought under his leadership.<sup>117</sup> However, his leadership lasted only a few weeks before security forces arrested him. Meliani was succeeded by Abdelhak Layada who brought in two further groups under the banner of the GIA. The GIA, believed in the establishment of an Islamic state through force of arms. Layada has asserted that,

We reject the religion of democracy. We affirm that political pluralism is equal to sedition. It has never been our intention to participate in elections or enter parliament. Besides, the right to legislate belongs solely to God.<sup>118</sup>

Initially the GIA was predominately characterised by guerrilla warfare against the security services and by sabotage and bomb attacks against state-run institutions. However, later the definition of legitimate targets was expanded to include anyone who represented the regime, such as journalists and included foreign nationals living in Algeria.<sup>119</sup> Soon after, the GIA became more purist in its advocacy of unbridled violence. Its members burnt schools, murdered women who were immodestly dressed, used car

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113. M. Willis, op. cit., 282.

114. Ibid. 268.

115. M. Willis, op. cit., 281.

116. B. Maddy Weitzman, op. cit., 183.

117. Ibid. 280.

118. Ibid. 282.

119. Ibid. 283.

bombs in crowded cities and hijacked an Air France jetliner. This approach has been likened to Frantz Fanon's teachings on the cleansing, purifying properties of violence.<sup>120</sup>

The collapse of attempts at dialogue between the regime and the FIS forced the FIS to reassess its political strategy. The failed talks confirmed the party's fears that the regime would never be prepared to make any fruitful concessions in negotiations. As a result defections to the GIA became rampant as members of the FIS became convinced that they would never be able to defeat the regime unless a military strategy was adopted. Moreover, very prominent members of the FIS had decided to defect.<sup>121</sup> This placed obvious pressure on the remainder of the FIS leaders to respond. The defections were portrayed by the GIA as a form of unification with the FIS under the banner of the GIA. This was considered unacceptable to the FIS who believed that the proclaimed unification would threaten the name of the FIS and the degree of popular legitimacy the group had fought hard to accrue since 1989. The FIS therefore fervently denounced the unification. However, the FIS realised that condemnation of the GIA was an insufficient response to the challenges the GIA represented. The strength the GIA had gained concerned the FIS as it realised that it would further limit the chances of striking a deal with the regime. Firstly, by negotiating for its rightful place the FIS would lose popular support to the GIA. Secondly, the very real concern existed that hard-liners in the regime would deny any form of negotiations with any Islamists because of the increasingly bloody and indiscriminate campaign launched by the GIA.<sup>122</sup>

The FIS therefore realised the need to create its own armed wing. The reasons for this were twofold. Firstly, it would prevent the GIA from dominating the armed struggle and thereby threatening any commitments made by the party in negotiations with the regime. Secondly, it was hoped that it would prevent the mass defections. This however, proved a formidable task since the GIA had acquired a strong standing with the defections. Fortunately, more Islamists were to join, not from the release of those in the detention

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120. B. Maddy Weitzman, *op. cit.*, 182.

121. M. Willis, *op. cit.*, 325.

122. *Ibid.* 326.

camps in the Sahara, but from a mass prison break-out from the Tazoult prison in 1994 which freed over a thousand Islamist activists, including very senior members. The time spent in prison had strengthened the convictions of these individuals. The various groups were unified, and in July of the same year the AIS was created. This armed struggle was subordinated to the political leadership of the FIS.<sup>123</sup>

Since its formation, the AIS has made a point of distinguishing itself from other Islamist organisations. It rejected the GIA's ideology and war strategy as it saw its struggle as political and remained strictly within the confines of a military operation. The group has been recorded to assert that:

The apostate regime today attributes to the jihad certain abominable operations of which the defenceless people have been victims....These untruths lead the Armée Islamique du Salut to reply that it is innocent of all those acts and has never given an order to attack a woman, to burn a school or hospital, or for any other operation contrary to our religion.<sup>124</sup>

Ultimately the AIS saw the GIA as harming the cause. The GIA's ideology of installing an Islamic state, and its application of imported Middle Eastern ideologies irritated the people and turned support away from the Islamists. The AIS has stated that:

Jihad is not a suicide which those in dead end situations take as a solution, those are wretched characters; nor is it vengeance for the benefit for those who want to settle scores, those are motivated by hatred, nor is it an adventure with an uncertain outcome, started by adventurers and outlaws; nor an anarchist movement recruiting all the hotheads without standards or rules of life; nor is it a matter of blind honour such as is practised by the ignorant; nor a leap forward with closed eyes, which would mean a lack of vision and programme.<sup>125</sup>

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123. Ibid. 327.

124. L. Martinez, *The Algerian Civil War 1990-1998*, London, C, Hurst & Co, Ltd, 2000, 203.

125. Ibid. 204.

Besides the role played by the GIA in wreaking havoc amongst groups and within the country, the Algerian military too has been instrumental in causing chaos in the ranks of Muslim militants. Tactics included publishing false statements in the name of an Islamist organisation, or accusations levelled at one group of masterminding the killing of a prominent member of another group. Rumours abound. One which caused great concern was the rumour that the GIA planned to kill imprisoned Abbasi Madani's daughter, who reputedly does not wear a veil, and blame her death on the authorities.<sup>126</sup> The military also tried to gain the upper hand in the struggle by other illegitimate means. A riot in the Sekardji jail in Algiers resulted in the deaths of predominately Islamist prisoners, most notably Ahmed El Wed, a founder of the GIA. The official death toll was reported as 96. The authorities claimed that the response was necessary to prevent an attempted break-out. There were, however, strong suspicions amongst Islamists and others that the affair had been orchestrated by the regime in order to wipe out a number of Islamists to avenge a car bomb explosion outside the main police station in Algiers. FIS sources claimed that the number of Islamists killed was as high as 230. The military regime also believed that elimination of the Islamists would prevent re-entry into armed groups through breakouts or amnesties. The military controlled government advocated a one-track policy of eliminating the Islamist threat.<sup>127</sup>

In April 1999 the Algerian people went to the polls for the fourth time in four years in an attempt to end the perpetual violence that had consumed their country since the Algerian military elite abrogated elections in 1992. In distinct contrast to the 1997 legislative elections that were relatively free and included a fair amount of legalised Islamic parties, in the 1999 elections 6 of the 7 presidential candidates boycotted the election. Turnout was extremely low and the victor, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, an ageing member of the FLN, appeared to be the hand picked candidate of the Algerian military elite. However, contrary to popular expectations, June brought a cease-fire between the government and the FIS. In a further attempt to ease unrest the *concorde civile* adopted by the Assemblée

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126. W.H. Miller, *Insurgency theory and the Conflict in Algeria: A Theoretical Analysis, Terrorism and Political Violence*, 12, 2000, 75.

127. M. Willis, *op. cit.*, 347.

Populaire Nationale granted amnesty to approximately 20 000 insurgents and political prisoners.<sup>128</sup> Despite, the amnesty agreements violence still continues and attention is being focused on *Le Pouvoir*, the military kingpins as the men responsible for the violence that has engulfed Algeria for over a decade.

### 3.2.5 Conclusion

The initial onslaught began with the military and in an atmosphere riddled with violence other groups emerged. As illustrated above, the GIA's behaviour has been extremely violent, nonetheless members of the military have also used underhanded techniques in their attempt to eradicate the Islamist threat. The focus of the following two parts is specifically on the military and more importantly, the military elite.

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128. W.H. Miller, op. cit, 75.



### 3.3 The Military

#### 3.3.1 Introduction

The ANP always viewed itself as protector of the revolutionary ideals. However, after the coup and the purges which succeeded it, the army's reputation was severely tarnished resulting in the establishment of the Free Officers Group. This group sought to distance itself from the atrocities which had been perpetrated against the Algerian people whom the Algerian army had sworn to protect. Following the coup which brought Boumedienne into power an elite group of military men have wielded extensive power in Algerian political life. The following details the role of the ANP and the military elite in the unfolding of a war which has taken between 100 000 and 150 000 thousand Algerian lives.

#### 3.3.2 The ANP

In Algeria the largest and most coherent organisation is the army. In the mid 1990s it had the dubious honour of being the largest in the Maghreb and one of the most powerful in the Arab world. The most recent statistics placed the military as comprising 138 000 men, 70 000 of whom were conscripts on eighteen month service. The rest was made up of 5 500 men in the navy, 12 000 in the air force and 23 000 gendarmes.<sup>129</sup>

The wealth disparity between high ranking officers and the rest of the rank and file has always been disproportionate. Desirable real estate was often channelled to army officers at very low prices and senior army officers were granted luxury villas. The rest of the army, especially those stationed in the desert, lived in particularly poor living conditions. The majority of the conscripts viewed their life in the army as one better forgotten.<sup>130</sup> The crisis subsequent to the coup also highlighted the overburdened and inefficient military bureaucracy. Moreover, the rank and file were poorly trained, equipped and commanded

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129. M. Stone, *op. cit.*, 130.

130. *Ibid.* 131.

and as a result suffered high casualty rates during the initial stages of the conflict. The company commanders were therefore obliged to refer most decisions to senior officers who often spoke of hard-line security measures without going into too much detail.<sup>131</sup>

As a result of the brutal eradication campaign advocated by senior military officials, the army's reputation continued to dwindle.<sup>132</sup> From statements issued by senior military personnel, the eradication was justified because the Islamists would destroy the Algeria the army had fought so hard to secure in its fight for independence. The following is a statement issued by General Khaled Nezzar,

Democracy does not mean anarchy, freedom of expression cannot be synonymous with violence and intimidation. It would be intolerable of men coming to power through democracy to lead us to dictatorship...What have all the achievements of the ANP since independence come to if people come to cast doubt on the authenticity of its roots as well as the respectability of its structures? Does not a holy verse in the Koran proclaim, 'If a depraved man brings you news, get proof together first, for fear of doing people wrong through ignorance and having to regret one fine day what you have done'?<sup>133</sup>

Although various statements from senior members are obtainable, information from the rank and file is limited. At the outset of the war it was however hoped that the army would support the Islamists, however this was not the case. The incomprehension of the army to come to terms with the Islamists is most aptly expressed by a young student in an Algiers suburb,

It is disheartening, I swear to you, I don't understand why the army is defending the communist. They should let them die or leave for France if they want to live like "kuffar" [infidels]. I don't understand why the army is not with the FIS. The

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131. Ibid. 136.

132. Ibid. 137.

133. L. Martinez, *op. cit.*, 166.

FIS is the people, the army must be with the people. Even though it is true there are some soldiers on our side – but not all.<sup>134</sup>

As the war continued, and the brutality continued, a new voice was heard from the ANP. The atrocities committed which many Algerians believed were the work of the military led to the establishment of the Free Officers Group. This group blamed a military elite for the violence engulfing Algeria and issued the following proclamation,

We officers faithful to the surmount of November the first 1954. Faithful to the wholly [lit] principals of the Algerian people from which we are issue. We proclaim solemnly with a high voice our indignation, our refusal to keep quiet in front of the incessant genocide of our fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters and children.

The limits of the barbarism and the incredible have been once again exceeded on the land of our ancestors.

The National Popular Army has always been the symbol of honour and sacrifice, but the arrival of high officers (former French officers or relatives) to the command, took us forty years back. The clock is at the time of the occupation.

For all these reasons and to follow the example of our brothers officers and under officers cowardly executed since the first hours of the civil war by other members of the Popular National Army, acting under the orders of Mariane, we will fight these new harkis and their alley till the last drop of our blood.

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134. Ibid. 67.

At the time where the Algerians live the darkest days of their history, it is advisable to incline in front of the dignity of the people, which is suffering silently in its flesh and its soul behind a metallic shutter.

Glory to our Martyrs

Glory to the Algerian people.<sup>135</sup>

Abdelhamid Brahimi, a former Algerian prime minister now in exile in London, also stated that the regular army was eclipsed by the creation of other groups responsible for the violence in Algeria and headed by a select group of generals.<sup>136</sup> One such group is *Securite Militaire*.

*Securite Militaire* (SM) was and possibly remains the most effective service in Algeria. The head of the service in 1993 was General Mohamed Mediene. This service was part of Algerian history since its establishment in 1965 under Boumedienne when the coup leader used the service to rid the army of personnel he deemed of questionable loyalty, most notably the guerrilla fighters. In the 1970s the service was used extensively to monitor and maintain files on potential individuals who opposed the national leadership.

SM was often less circumscribed in its operations, with cases of detention of suspects in undisclosed locations having been ascribed to its dealings. Later the important role of national security was assumed by the General Delegation for Documentation and Security (*Delegation Generale de Documentation et Surete*, DGDS). During the riots of 1988 which claimed the lives of over 500 Algerians and widely published accounts of torture by this organisation and SM, the government was forced to respond. In 1990 Benjedid announced the dissolution of DGDS. However, after the coup of 1992, reports

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135. ANP, *Surmount We officers faithful to the surmount of November the first 1954*, [Online], Available: <http://www.anp.org/engindex/altragedyeng1.htm> - 4k -, [7 December 2002], 2002.

136. S. Saad, *The Horror Gripping Algeria Is Not Mindless Violence But Carefully Choreographed Chaos and Corruption*, [Online], Available: [www.washington-report.org/backissues/0498/9804050.html](http://www.washington-report.org/backissues/0498/9804050.html) - 42k - [2 July 2002], 1998.

indicated that SM was indeed alive and well and remained the senior intelligence body concerned with the internal security of the country.<sup>137</sup>

Notwithstanding Algerian predilections for rumour and conspiracy theory, the theories that SM was very likely involved in covert activities, which included the infiltration of its own agents or others into certain terrorist groups, the most notable being the GIA, were probably true. The primary objective would have been to obtain information on its respective capabilities. There was also speculation that the SM actually organised the formation of certain GIA katibat (cells) and was responsible for carrying out some of the more horrific terrorist incidents with the sole objective of creating public revulsion against the GIA and by extension the entire illegal Islamist movement, thereby rallying support for the state. Although it is virtually impossible to prove these allegations, the history of covert operations during the war of independence lends them credence.<sup>138</sup>

### 3.3.3 *Le Pouvoir*

*For ten years, in order to preserve their privileges, the generals in Algiers have plunged their country into bloody chaos through state terrorism and by manipulating violence, hiding behind a sophisticated system of disinformation....*

Libération 29 June<sup>139</sup>

Le Pouvoir is the name given to an elite military group. The men comprising this group were reputedly behind the violence in Algeria. The FIS and the Free Officers, along with Amnesty International and Algeria Watch, The Washington Post and the Observer, and the former Algerian prime minister, Abdelhamid Brahimi all maintained that a military

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137. Library of Congress, op. cit.

138. M. Stone, op. cit., 136.

139. Algeria Groups Network: *Amnesty International - UK Section*, [Online], Available: <http://www.amnesty-volunteer.org/uk/algeria/>, [9 November 2002], 2001.

elite was instrumental in the violence Algeria experienced. Five of the members of this military elite were particularly influential, namely Khaled Nezzar, Minister of Defence; General Mohamed Mediene, Head of Military Security; General Smain Lamari, Head of Counter-espionage; General Larbi Belheir, Director of President Bouteflika's Cabinet; and General Mohammed Lamari, Chief of Staff (Head of the Army). Specific details on these men are difficult to obtain.<sup>140</sup> From various reports especially those of the Free Officers and the FIS, it would appear that these generals are viewed as harkis, the name given to Algerians who fought for the French during the war of liberation or who switched sides when they realised the French could no longer hang onto Algeria. A beseeching narrative by Jacques Vergas also alludes to the French heritage of those in control.

Verges left the French Communist Party in 1957 because it opposed independence for Algeria. He then joined the FLN and defended many Algerian Revolutionaries. He speaks to a friend with whom he fought alongside in the Algerian war of liberation and who maintained a high post in the government service, as a member of the Higher State Committee and says that "You are not in the same position of some current Algerian generals who wait until the die was cast to join the FLN in 1958, 1959, and 1960. They have never claimed to be humanists."<sup>141</sup>

The only information obtainable regarding the backgrounds of these men is a short write-up on General Khaled Nezzar by Algeria-Watch. The others appear to be shrouded by a cloud of mystery as reported by Amnesty International. This seems to be the case for most military men ever since the war of independence. William Quandt in his analysis of the political leadership of Algeria between 1954-1968 also noted that information on the military men was hard to come by and most of their backgrounds were unknown.<sup>142</sup>

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140. Ibid.

141. J. Verges, op. cit.

142. W.B. Quandt, op. cit., 110.

Khaled Nezzar trained at a military academy in Strasbourg then St-Maixent. He fought for the French in Germany where he attained the rank of second lieutenant. He deserted from the French army in April 1958. During the war of liberation he worked for the ALN as an instructor on the Algerian-Tunisian border where he was largely responsible for providing information to recruits. Later he was made an assistant to Colonel Chadli Benjedid, the military head of the base in Ghardimaou<sup>143</sup>. After the coup of 1965 which brought Boumedienne to power, Boumedienne did away with the national defence portfolio to ensure his control over the ANP. The defence portfolio was revived in 1990 by Benjedid who appointed Nezzar as head of the military. Nezzar replaced Major General Abdallah Bel Houchet in 1988 as a clean up after the 1988 riots<sup>144</sup>. Amnesty International has however reported that neither Mediene nor Smain served in the French army.<sup>145</sup>

Possibly the most damning indictment of these men came from a young career secret agent in the SM, who recently defected to Britain. Yusuf-Joseph maintained that the violence which enveloped Algeria was perpetrated predominately by Le Pouvoir with Mediene and Smain Lamari being at the forefront of the massacres. He maintained that the bombings in 1995 which outraged Paris were not the work of Muslim extremists, but the handy work of the secret service in an attempt to galvanise French support for the current Algerian regime. He further maintained that the relentless massacres in Algeria were the work of the secret services. He asserted that Le Pouvoir was behind the massacres in order to maintain a state of fear.<sup>146</sup> To further strengthen the position of these men, a special group was created in 1992 by General Lamari Smain. This group was known as the *L'Escadron de la Mort* (The Squadron of Death) and had as one of its main missions the eradication of colonels and officers. Lending credence to his story is Martin Stone's remarks that retirements, dismissals and death of senior army officers

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143. Algeria-Watch, *Informations sur la situation des droits humains*, [Online], Available: <http://www.algeria-watch.de/francais.htm> - -[16 October 2002], 2002.

144. Library of Congress, op. cit.

145. Algeria Groups Network, op. cit.

146. J. Sweeney, and L. Doyle, 1997, 9 November, *We Bombed Paris for Algeria*, The Observer.

signalled a shift in the balance of power within the military favouring the zero tolerance line held by the military elite.<sup>147</sup>

The generals also reputedly control the media and the lucrative industries in Algeria. Most newspapers are controlled by these Generals. *Nouvelle Republique* by General Khaled Nezzar, *El Watan* by General Mohamed Lamari, *Jeune Independent*, *El Khabar* and *Quotidien d'Oran* by the head of military security, General Mohamed Mediene (a.k.a Tewfik). Cellular phones are forbidden to all except a few of the highest state officials. Moreover, any vocal critics of the government are usually censored and imprisoned. The means of attaining information is through friends and family in Algeria with the publication taking place in cities such as Paris, London and Montreal, since it is possible to bypass official Algerian media channels in these places. The reports are often then picked up by European and American news channels and sent back to Algeria via satellite links. The October 1988 riots, which were squashed by the military, were picked up by *Radio-Beur*, a Paris-based immigrant radio station. The station received telephone reports from witnesses and those who participated in the riots and then these were re-transmitted via satellite to Algerian listeners in France and in Algeria.<sup>148</sup>

The Algerians also name each general in this military elite according to the products he monopolises, for instance, general of oil, general of sugar.<sup>149</sup>

### 3.3.4 Conclusion

The Algerian military's reputation, as protector of the Algerian people, has been badly tarnished since the onset of the conflict. This has led to the establishment of the Free Officers Group and others speaking out against those who appear to be in the forefront of the war, namely *Le Pouvoir*. The establishment of secret organisations working

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147. M. Stone, op. cit., 136-137.

148. P.A. Silverstein, *Conspiracy Theory and the Transnationalization of the Algerian Civil War*, [Online], Available: [http://www.merip.org/mer/mer214/214\\_silverstein.htm](http://www.merip.org/mer/mer214/214_silverstein.htm), [24 November 2002].

149. B. Madani, op. cit.



independently of the military, but under the control of these generals, has strengthened the conviction that this elite group is in control.

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### 3.4 Behaviour During the War

*Thirty years ago, I denounced the practice of torture by the police and a section of the French army in Algeria. If, at that time, I had been told that torture would be used again against Algerians and by those who claim to be the heirs of the Revolution, I would not have believed it despite my having no illusions about human beings. I was, undoubtedly, naïve. So we all were.*

Jacques Vergas<sup>150</sup>

#### 3.4.1 Introduction

The military elite's use of terror displayed a remarkable similarity to that deployed by the French during the war of liberation. What follows is an exposition of these similarities and the continued use of terror and covert activities by the military during the conflict.

#### 3.4.2 Terror and Covert Activities

When the French began their campaign of depopulating rural areas during the war of liberation, they inadvertently created an urban insurgency. In the slums surrounding Algiers these peasants lived in abject poverty and despair which provided a fertile breeding ground for insurgency recruitment. The French military however, quickly adopted a technique of ascertaining the identities of those inhabiting these slums and restricting their individual movement. The military officers first compiled lists detailing the inhabitants of each house. Then, during curfew periods these houses were searched and individuals who did not belong in the house would be taken into custody. Those that were not found were hunted down. Suspects were often detained indefinitely and tortured, leading to the unearthing of further terrorist cells. This procedure resulted in the death or capture of most insurgents and most of the rebel cells were destroyed.

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150. J. Verges, op. cit.

In the case of the current conflict, similar methods were employed. The military repeatedly cordoned off neighbourhoods and used hooded informers to search houses and arrest suspects. In its attempt to push out the guilty it often sealed off whole districts in the capital city for days at a time. Instead of using regular military personnel an anti-terrorist elite group was set up by the military elite. These men were known as ninjas since they wore black masks and black uniforms and were used to patrol and root out terrorist cells in most of Algeria's major cities.<sup>151</sup>

During the fight for independence the French justified the use of torture as a tactical gain. Torture was a means of acquiring intelligence information whose usefulness was limited in time. In reality, the use of torture had a goal far more important than the stated one. It was in fact used to inspire terror within the FLN cadres and the entire Algerian population. Torture during the fight for independence brought France to the brink of its destruction. It has been suggested that the only way in which France would have maintained its dominance over Algeria was if the country's political system had been reshaped along totalitarian lines. The military presence in Algeria precluded a commitment to human rights values and therefore those in control had significantly more leeway in their fight against the insurgents. Amnesty International routinely reported on the use of torture on the part of the security forces and victims were held in undisclosed locations for weeks. These reports also described the use of extra-judicial executions used as an alternative to arresting the suspects or even in retaliation for ambushes. Collective punishment such as the destruction of homes and even whole villages in retaliation for the killing of soldiers were also common experiences according to these reports.<sup>152</sup> It was also reported that many mass killings have occurred in the most militarised regions in the country and often in the shadows of army barracks. Yet, no military personnel intervened to stop the massacres. In addition, most of these massacres took place in areas with a large FIS support base.<sup>153</sup> This has led to the supposition that the massacres took place with the consent, or even on the instruction of certain army and security forces.

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151. W.H. Miller, op. cit., 73.

152. Ibid. 73-74.

153. P. Sané, Secretary General-Amnesty International, *Algeria: When the State Fails*, News Service 222/97, AI INDEX: MDE 28/47/97, 1997.

Strangely enough within this perpetual violence the state managed to provide adequate security during presidential, legislative and local elections in 1995, 1997 and 1999. Sufficient and efficient security was also guaranteed at all times in the lucrative oil and gas zones. Foreign companies received the best protection possible from the security forces. The security forces, on the other hand, failed dismally in their duty to protect the civilian population.<sup>154</sup>

Individual cases of torture have also come to light. Amnesty International publicized reports of people who disappeared, compiled from accounts provided by their families. Two such individuals were fortunate enough to survive to tell the tale, Brahim Ladada and Abdelkrim Khider. Both were taken from their families to the SM base in Ben Aknoun on suspicion of being Islamic extremists. They were kept in detention for around 12 days, the maximum period a detainee may be kept without being charged or before seeing a magistrate. The two men were denied access to family, lawyers or doctors. They were repeatedly tortured throughout their stay and allegedly remained completely undressed throughout this period. They were beaten with batons and plastic pipes and tortured using the chiffon method.<sup>155</sup> It is estimated that over 4 000 people detained at the SM base in Ben Aknoun, disappeared. SM remains the service most accused of committing gross human rights violations.<sup>156</sup>

The FIS repeatedly used the French utilisation of torture in arguing its case against the brutality inflicted by the military regime. The FIS argued that although the current regime harps on about the need to acquire justice and reparations for war crimes committed against Algerians during the war of liberation, when the opportunity arose they fell silent. The FIS viewed this silence as an indication of embarrassment and guilt.<sup>157</sup> The recent confessions of summary execution and torture by military personnel such as Massu, Aussaresses and Bigeard reinforced the idea that the use of institutionalised torture by the

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154. Ibid.

155. This method will be discussed in detail later.

156. Amnesty International, *Appeal case – Algeria Torture of Brahim Ladada and Abdelkrim Khider*, 14/11/2002, AI INDEX: MDE 28/020/2002, 2002.

157. Front Islamique du Salut, *Do not forget the ongoing torture in Algeria*, [Online], Available: <http://www.ccfis.org/dispcol.asp?art=110&HiddenPage=1> - 14k - [16 October 2002].

French military has been adopted again after independence. As mentioned previously, the FIS averred that the generals that rule the country were erstwhile French officers who infiltrated the ALN at the behest of the French superiors or joined them when they realised that the fight for independence would succeed. The Algerians called these people 'hizb franca', 'party of France', or harkis. The FIS asserted that many of Algeria's current military leaders took part in the practise of torture of Algerians.<sup>158</sup>

The actions of security forces further resulted in their alienation from the Algerian people. Torture had become rife and almost routine after the cancellation of the 1992 elections. Amnesty International in 1993 reported that the security forces frequently resorted to administrative detention without charge. Forms of torture included beatings, burning, and near suffocation. The 'chiffon' method was most often used. This involved the detainee swallowing large quantities of water until he/she almost suffocates.<sup>159</sup> The water torture is reminiscent of torture by the French in the war of liberation which was particularly rife. Aussaresses, captain in the French Special Services attached to the French army in Algeria between 1955 and 1957, had this to say about water torture,

The methods I used were always the same: beatings, electric shocks, and in particular water torture, which was the most dangerous technique for the prisoner. It never lasted for more than one hour and the suspects would speak in the hope of saving their lives. They would therefore either talk quickly or never.<sup>160</sup>

Furthermore, after the coup the notion of a fair trial in the special anti-terrorist courts was virtually non-existent and recourse to the death penalty used with frightening frequency.<sup>161</sup>

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158. Ibid.

159. Amnesty International, *Appeal case – Algeria Torture of Brahim Ladada and Abdelkrim Khider*, op. cit.

160. M. Ignatieff, *The Torture Wars*, New Republic, 226 (15), Database: Academic Search Premier, [18 November 2002], 2002, 226.

161. M. Stone, op. cit., 197.

It should be noted that terrorist activity was also being used to settle blood feuds and vendettas which have traditionally played a major role in Algerian society. Many attacks often ascribed to terrorist activity by Islamic extremists in fact represented settling of scores which originated in times of greater security and stability. An example would be the assassination of Kasdi Merbah, former Prime Minister and former Chief of the SM in August 1993, which was most probably not the work of Islamic extremists, but more likely that of his former enemies within the state apparatus. Reports even indicated that former landowners hired militias to raid villages in order to regain land within the chaos of the crisis, especially in the Mitidja in the years 1996 and 1997.<sup>162</sup>

Finally, although the number of reported cases of torture decreased markedly over the last two to three years, Amnesty International continues to receive dozens of accounts of people who have been subjected to torture. The majority of the detained individuals were arrested on suspicion of having ties with armed Islamist groups or being part of anti-government protests<sup>163</sup>.

The Algerian military's response to opposition has always been violent and a pattern can be seen from its establishment during the war of liberation to the current behaviour of its elite. The Algerian military elite appears to have modelled its use of terror on that used by the French army, from its means of finding those who oppose them to its use of torture.

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162. Ibid. 178.

163. Amnesty International, *Appeal case – Algeria Torture of Brahim Ladada and Abdelkrim Khider*, op. cit.

### 3.4.3 Assassinations

Assassinations appear to be a recurrent theme in Algerian history. The following highlights the most dramatic assassination since the coup of 1992. The events of the assassination are compiled from an analysis of the proceedings provided by the Free Officers. However, the suspicions surrounding Boudiaf's assassination are well documented and many authors and most Algerians believe there is credence in the averment that he was eliminated because of his anti-corruption stance by members of the military elite.<sup>164</sup>

Martin Stone quotes the five guiding principles behind Boudiaf's anti-corruption campaign, which would definitely have sent shivers down the spines of most of the Algerian political and military elite. Boudiaf had the following to say,

First: nobody...can use me as a means of vengeance or for settling of accounts. Second: the dossier of property acquired through suspect methods will be dealt with within the framework of the law and by means of justice. Third: the people have the right to demand the shedding of light on the management of the state's monies and property. It also has the right to look into these issues. We promised to open this case and we will honour our promise. Fourth: in the future, all precautions will be taken and all necessary means will be adopted to put a final end to these practises that corrupt our country and tarnish its reputation. Fifth: I agree to the setting up of an investigatory commission to study some cases of corruption. It would be appropriate for this commission to be supervised by members of the National Consultative Committee.<sup>165</sup>

According to the Free Officers, after the coup the military wanted to present a civilian facade to placate the Algerian people and the international community. The generals Khaled Nezzar, AbdelMalek Guenaizia, Mohamed Lamari, Mohamed Mediene and

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164. H. Saleh, January 11, *Algeria's Decade of Bloody Conflict*, BBC News, 2002.

165. M. Stone, op. cit., 109.

Mohamed Touati had to find a president quickly. To further create a sense of legitimacy, the person chosen had to be a veteran of the war of liberation with a clean past. This they found in the person of Boudiaf.

Boudiaf was a close friend of Kasdi Merbah, the former head of the SM, killed in August 1993. Boudiaf wanted to reopen the Belloucif case. This was one of the suspected reasons behind the assassination. Many Algerians believed that Chadli Benjedid and other generals would be implicated in the reopening of the case. The case involved misappropriation of funds into the purchase of a radar system which could cover the entire Algerian territory. Moustefa Belloucif who was the general secretary of the Ministry of Defence at the time, refused to sign off on the project. Belloucif was officially discharged by Benjedid for corruption and unprofessional conduct.

Boudiaf worked with the slogan “Algeria before anything else”. This meant clearing Algeria of all corruption, and this was to be achieved with the aid of Kasdi Merbah and Colonel Mourad. One of the most important scandals was the amount of 65 million dollars which had disappeared in 12 years. Colonel Mourad was to investigate these misappropriations and whether some of the money could be found and given back. Boudiaf contacted the then French Premier Minister Pierre Bérégovoy to assist in the investigation of certain Algerian officials in France.

A few days later Colonel Mourad and three of his aides went to Paris. A week after his return to Algeria, Colonel Mourad was shot dead and the three aides that accompanied him were murdered in the two weeks that followed. Upon hearing of the death of Colonel Mourad, Boudiaf fled to Morocco in the middle of the night without telling anyone. It was the first time in Algerian history that a president abandoned his position. However, through persuasion, the president returned, but all files assembled on prominent members in the military and certain politicians had been stolen.

This fervent stance against corruption could not be tolerated and it is believed that a plan was developed by Khaled Nezzar, Toufik and Larbi Belkeir to eliminate the president.



This would be achieved by infiltrating the presidential security service (SSP) and the special intervention group (GIS). The man who would be responsible for the killing was second-lieutenant Boumaraafi. At a speech in Annaba surrounded by both the SSP and GIS, Boudiaf was assassinated as the Algerian people watched. In a strange turn of events, Boumaraafi fled the scene and ran into the nearest house, called the police and told them he had just assassinated the president. His reason, he feared that Smain wanted him dead and he was probably right. Kamal Aidoun a member of the presidential team had failed in his mission in Annaba. Smain Lamari had told him to eliminate Boumaraafi. Kamal had fled after the incident. He was caught with his brother and both were eliminated.<sup>166</sup>

Once again, the authenticity of most covert accounts coming from Algeria cannot be completely verified in an atmosphere riddled with conspiracy. However, the elimination of revolutionaries during the war of independence, such as Abane, and Khider and Krim under Boumedienne, lend credence to the idea that elimination of unwanted opposition was the practise in Algerian political life. Moreover, the emphasis placed by Boudiaf on the elimination of corruption does tend to point to those who were benefiting within the corrupt system as accomplices to the crime which would place responsibility at the door of the elite, whether military or political. However, popular academic opinion, international media, army officers and humanitarian organisations place responsibility with the military elite.

#### **3.4.4 Conclusion**

The behaviour of the Algerian military, subsequent to the coup, displays similar characteristics to that displayed by the French during the Algerian war of liberation. Methods adopted to round up suspects, torture and disappearances mirror that of the French army. The fact that many of the current generals served in the French army reinforces the mirror image of the French army in the eyes of the Algerian people. The

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166. ANP, *Surmount We officers faithful to the surmount of November the first 1954*, op. cit.

eradication of those not in agreement with the military elite is a pattern of military behaviour since the war of liberation.

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### 3.5 Sustaining Military Rule – International Community

#### 3.5.1 Introduction

The international community has been pivotal in ensuring that the military remain in power in Algeria. Often overt, but sometimes covert, the countries discussed hereunder have supported the military state both financially and militarily. It is also evident that after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attacks, the military elite has found new partners in its war against terrorism.

#### *Europe's gas bill*

British journalist John Sweeney's description of the over 80 000 deaths in Algeria.<sup>167</sup>

Subsequent to the atrocities which followed the 1992 coup, the European government released ECU 60 million to the Algerian military government. The agreement was signed on December 2, 1996 and the total loan package was worth ECU 125 million and was conditional upon conforming to the traditional structural adjustment programmes as supervised by the International Monetary Fund and World Bank. The European Union supported a military dictatorship since the FIS proclaimed social reform as its top priority.<sup>168</sup> In his electoral campaign Abbasi Madani emphasised that Islam was the religion of the people, ensured social justice and as a result was capable of producing the primary guidelines for a just political and social order.<sup>169</sup> He accused the West of

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167. J. Sweeney, 1997, 16 November, *We Accuse, 80, 000 Times*, The Observer.

168. N. Mosaddeq Ahmed, *Algeria and the Paradox of Democracy*, [Online], Available: <http://www.amnesty-volunteer.org/uk/algeria/>, [2 January 2003], 2001.

169. M. Willis, op. cit., 157.

fostering individual rights and the elite government of maintaining them. As a former member of the FLN, he claimed that the party had forsaken its noble principles and had become dominated by self-interest. The failures of Algeria were not only as a consequence of the ineptitude of the FLN and its bureaucracy, but also as a result of neo-colonialism and imperialism which had ensured the domination of the oil market by the West and the effective decay of economies of the developing world, such as Algeria. Abbasi Madani accused the FLN of selling out to the West for short-term economic gain at the expense of a sustainable future for Algerians. The FLN had made Algeria dependent on an oil market controlled by the West and by selling its most precious mineral commodity to the West at a cheap rate.<sup>170</sup>

Such assertions frightened foreign countries with interests in Algeria, and explains their support for the military regime. Algeria has the fifth largest oil and gas reserves in the world. It is the second largest gas exporter and ranks fourteenth for oil reserves. Approximately 90% of Algeria's crude oil exports go to Western Europe, including Italy, Germany, France, the Netherlands, Spain and Britain. Algeria's most important trading partners are Italy, France, the United States, Germany and Spain.

Investment in Algeria flourished since 1991, the dawn of the army's more overt role. In December 1991 the Algerian state opened the energy sector to foreign investors. Over 30 oil and gas companies have been set up in the country since then, these include American firms such as Arco, Exxon, Oryx, Anadarko, Mobil and Sun Oil which received exploration permits, often in association with European firms such as Agip, BP, and Cepsa.<sup>171</sup>

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170. Ibid. 159.

171. N. Mosaddeq Ahmed, op. cit.

### 3.5.2 French Support

The French explained their understanding of the crisis as follows: first, the conflict was simple, it was one between Islamists and the state; second, the Islamists wanted an Islamic state; and third an Islamic republic would be an unmitigated disaster for France since it would result in millions of anti-Islamist 'boat people' fleeing their home country for the shores of sanctuary in France. This was the view of the conflict the French government espoused to the world which made it easier for the military government back in Algeria to pursue its policy of extermination. This view was vehemently endorsed in 1994-1995 especially by the then interior minister, Charles Pasqua.<sup>172</sup>

The French, however, went further than espousing a viewpoint supporting the military regime. Robert Fisk reported as early as 1994 on the covert military support provided by the French. This included helicopters and night sight technology for aerial surveillance of guerrilla hideouts. France has acknowledged selling nine Ecureuil helicopters to the Algerian government. These helicopters only need to be equipped with rockets and night sight equipment in order to serve a military purpose. Although France claimed that the helicopters were provided for civilian purposes their provision of the desired rockets and night equipment indicate otherwise<sup>173</sup>. The Islamist opposition to the military regime has also routinely accused France- its government or intelligence agencies- of covertly assisting its allies within the Algerian military. They drew attention to the fact that the GIA's communiqués always appeared to be issued in France.<sup>174</sup>

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172. M. Stone, op. cit., 242.

173. R. Fisk, *The Hijack: France and the Islamists: Public Enemy No. 1 (fwd)*, [Online], Available: <http://www.inic.utexas.edu/menic/utaustin/course/oilcourse/mail/france/0005.html>, [12 August 2002], 1995.

174. M. Stone, op. cit., 137.

### 3.5.3 Russian Support

The erstwhile Soviet Union maintained good diplomatic relations with Algeria ever since Algeria gained independence in 1962. However, in the 1980s when the Soviet bloc was beginning to falter, foreign relations with its former foe, the United States, improved. Nonetheless, Russia remained a military supplier to Algeria.

In Moscow on May 20, 2002 Major General Mohammed Lamari declared that the Algerian military “will cope, neutralise and suppress terrorism in Algeria”. This stance was encouraged by the Russian Defence Minister Sergei Ivanov who responded as follows, “We know what damage terrorism does to the economy and especially the people of Algeria. We know this from first hand experience because we are fighting this evil. This gives us a broad area for cooperation.”<sup>175</sup>

The Algerian military has much to thank the Russians for. Not only does it have full Russian support in its fight against terrorism, but it also has Russian military weapons to do it with. On May 28, 2001, Deputy Prime Minister Ilya Klebanov entered into an agreement with the Algerian army which seeks to help the Algerian army modernise over a ten year period.<sup>176</sup>

### 3.5.4 United States Support

Historically, the relationship between the United States and Algeria has been one of animosity. Algeria after independence adopted a socialist state which was contrary to the values embodied in the American way. The situation was further exacerbated by the United States support of Israel during the 1967 war. At this point the Algerians ceased diplomatic relations with the United States. Ideologically and politically the two countries differed vastly. Algeria was opposed to United States intervention in Vietnam and other developing countries, its support of Israel and its sympathies with Morocco in the

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175. AP Worldstream, 2002, 20 May, *Algerian Army Chief Meets with Russian Defence Minister*.

176. ITAR-TASS, 2002, 28 May, *Russia to Modernise Algerian Army in Ten-Year Programme*.

Western Sahara. The United States for its part resented Algerian support of guerrilla and radical revolutionary groups.

Although relations improved in the late 1970s, it was only under Benjedid that tensions lessened. Algeria became an important source of petroleum and natural gas for its erstwhile enemy. Following the coup, the United States issued a formal, though very low-key statement that the take-over would not be condoned. However, a mere twenty-four hours later this statement was retracted by a Department of State spokesperson. A new statement called for a peaceful resolution, but there was no condemnation of the coup.<sup>177</sup>

Since the declaration of the War on Terror, relations between Algeria and the United States have strengthened. The Algerian regime is a fervent supporter of the War on Terror since it legitimises the regime's behaviour on an international level.

### **3.5.5 Conclusion**

The military coup was not condemned by the superpowers, too much economically was at stake if an Islamist government took control. Financial support and military support has poured in since the coup which has strengthened the legitimacy of the military coup and the military elite's use of force to combat the Islamist threat. The superpowers have once again shown that they will actively support a military controlled state, with documented accounts of torture and disappearances, in pursuit of their own interests.

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177. Library of Congress, op. cit.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The French established the Algerian colony through war, a method only adopted in Algeria. Consequently, force as a means to achieve an end and the horrors involved in war were issues Algerians were confronted with from an early stage. Political groups established to voice the concerns of the Algerians were never unified and bitter rivalries were evident. Negotiations, reconciliation, compromise with the French, failed to achieve any political benefits for the Algerian people. The armed struggle became the only option to unify the cleavages amongst the various groups and to achieve independence. Throughout the liberation struggle petty rivalries persisted and those who posed a threat to the struggle were eliminated. The French army, for its part, employed torture as a tool to root out members of the FLN and to instil fear within the Algerian population.

At independence Algerian disunity was once again pronounced and only the might of the army and the cries of the Algerian people averted a civil war. Ben Bella's brief reign was embroiled with disputes, back-handed deals and assassinations. Opposition was not tolerated and often dealt with forcibly. The military coup of 1965 led by Boumedienne entrenched the power of the army and consolidated the power of a military elite.

Boumedienne reigned until his death in 1978. He kept a close group of military men by his side - known as the Oudja group. Dissent among Algerian society continued to be dealt with violently by the military. When Boumedienne became ill, it was the military elite who decided that one of its own, Colonel Benjedid, would succeed him. Benjedid became president in 1979 and as his predecessors had done, dealt forcibly with opposition. He similarly kept a close military group by his side at all times. It was this military elite, led by Khaled Nezzar, who decided to cancel the second round of elections and annul the first in Algeria's first democratic elections. The coup of 1992 successfully prevented the Islamic Salvation Army from taking its democratically earned position in government. Thereafter, the military onslaught began. Torture and disappearances reminiscent of French military policy was once again practised ensuring that the population lived in constant fear. Those who opposed the regime were silenced, usually



by the secret services with covert *modus operandi*. Throughout the conflict money and military supplies continued to flow into Algeria from the international community.

What becomes evident in this historical analysis is that the military has always played a dominant role in Algerian political life. Without a historical analysis the violence which succeeded the cancellation of the 1992 elections could easily be construed as extreme Islamic ideology or a religious - secular battle. History has illustrated that the Algerian military has always shown a willingness to use force and often terror, whether covert or overt to quell opposition.

#### **4.1 The Emergence of a Military Elite**

The ALN formed the backbone of the Algerian revolution and the military, in the form of the external army, determined the leadership of independent Algeria after the war of liberation. Since the coup of 1965, a select group of military men have always remained dominant in political affairs. This was clearly seen with Boumedienne's Oudja group, Benjedid's inner circle and by the establishment of the HCS.

During Boumedienne's reign the Oudja group maintained a form of internal cohesion necessary in a society deeply divided. Benjedid, his successor, himself a military man, knew the importance of the military and maintained a close group of military men in his inner circle. When the Islamists were poised for electoral victory, the military acted. The coup of 1992 was organised by senior military men who subsequently established a governing body which mirrored Boumedienne's Council of Revolution. Although overtly the reasons afforded were security and stability, maintenance of power, economic and political, were also motivating factors. The onslaught that followed the coup was headed by a military elite although once again a civilian facade was maintained. Mass arrests, detainment, summary executions and more overt use of military security became regular occurrences.

Although one cannot speak of a military regime, one active duty colonel<sup>178</sup> has been president since the coup of 1965 until the coup of 1992 and throughout the presidents' inner support group has always been military men. The military control of the country has remained a permanent fixture of Algerian political life and allegiances, rivalries, and responses to opposition evident at the initial stages of Algerian nationalism and throughout the revolution continue to plague Algerian politics. Although a facade of democracy exists with Algerians going to the polls, real power remains vested in a military elite.

#### **4.2 Violence and the Role of the Algerian Military**

Since the war of independence opposition was dealt with forcibly. The ALN not only fought the French but also Algerians who were not part of the cause or belonged to rival factions. At independence opposition was once again eliminated by the army, at the cost of many more Algerian lives. Ben Bella's reign was similarly riddled with exterminations of opposition through assassinations, exiles and executions. Boumedienne effected similar purges, and set up the SM which dealt with opposition internally and abroad. Benjedid kept the SM to control opposition which became more pronounced during his reign especially with the Amazigh people and the Islamists in the early 1980s. It was only after the backlash of the 1988 riots when torture was once again used and civilians killed that certain bodies within SM were closed because of the bad publicity the response to the riots had caused. Nonetheless, SM found its vigour once again after the coup. Covert military security is often prevalent in military controlled states. Such covert organisations were responsible for the disappearances and tortures that consumed Latin American states such as Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil in the 1960s and 1970s<sup>179</sup> and Algeria today.

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178. J.W. Harbeson, *The Military in African Politics*, New York, Praeger Publishers, 1987, 21.

179. A. Stepan, *Rethinking Military Politics*, Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1988, 14-29.

Accordingly, history has illustrated that it has always been the military or Military Security which has dealt with opposition, not through discussion, compromise, negotiation, but the way the military has been trained to deal with the enemy, through force.

#### **4.3 Terror as a Form of Violence**

Algerian reference to the war of liberation is a recurring theme in current Algerian society. The present military leadership is referred to as harkis, those who fought for the French in the war of liberation. Groups opposing the regime have researched the backgrounds of these men to illustrate their allegiance to the French. Although evidence of this is difficult to obtain with regard to all the men, a general grouping of the military elite with members of the French army or those who fled the French army when they realised the French cause was doomed, prevails among the opposition in Algerian society.

The war of liberation as a legitimating instrument remains sacred in Algerian society. In the case of the military elite it has added eminence. The torture practised mirrors that of the French and also the methods employed to root out the terrorists reflect those used by the French in rooting out the FLN. The horrors of the war of liberation are being repeated, however, this time they are being inflicted by Algerians on Algerians. It may be that the only way for ordinary Algerians to grasp what is happening is to find the link between the men who perpetrate these crimes and the French. Since, although many died at the end of the war of liberation through faction fighting, and although Algerians have been killed in protest demonstrations since then, rampant institutionalised torture, disappearances and summary executions and are far too reminiscent of French colonial military policy. The constant fear Algerians lived through, especially during the Battle of Algiers, is currently being relived. It would seem that to delineate Algerians from those they hold accountable for the crimes perpetrated, the French connection is sought.

The Algerian military has always been a dominant player in the political arena and as a result the sword has always been mightier than the pen. The Algerian people have endured terror and hardship in a bloody war of liberation, it is time that those who are supposed to protect the Algerian people fulfil their mandate, especially if they purport, as they currently do, to be a democracy. A historical pattern of military control and non-acceptance of opposition marks Algerian elite society. It is time that the Algerian people are given the opportunity to learn from history. It is time that the military goes back to the barracks, where it belongs.

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